
Report to: Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership Board (LEP Board)

Date: 6 June 2019

Subject: **Business Communications Group (BCG) update**

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1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To provide LEP Board members with an update on the meeting of the Business Communications Group (BCG), held on 20 March 2019.
- 1.2 To update the Board on key communications and marketing activities delivered by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Communications and Marketing team since the last meeting.

2. Information

BCG meeting

- 2.1 The BCG received updates and were invited to provide feedback on a number of areas of LEP and Combined Authority activity, including developments towards a City Region Connectivity Strategy/ mass transit network, the latest intelligence on the City Region's economic performance, the emerging Local Industrial Strategy and the LEP's business support offer. Members also highlighted the key issues and opportunities being reported to them by the businesses they represent.
- 2.2 The key comments made by BCG members in relation to the Connectivity Strategy development were:
 - Future plans to improve connectivity across the City Region must reflect the connectivity needs of the whole region, and not just connectivity between local areas and Leeds. It was suggested that a series of maps/ visuals be produced that demonstrate proposed developments within specific communities and how these will address local priorities.
 - A focus on increasing cycling and walking should be inherent within all future transport improvements

- Environmental and air quality improvements need to be central to driving thinking, but the cost-benefit appraisal of potential schemes must be robust.
- The story we tell about future transport improvements needs to set out a compelling vision of the future in terms that resonate with real people and different types of business. The challenges of engaging people and businesses on concepts for schemes that will not be delivered for many years were noted.
- The potential of securing private sector funding for transformational transport schemes was highlighted, if the vision is compelling enough.

2.3 BCG members discussed the latest **economic reporting** on the City Region economy and the headlines from the LEP's annual business survey. The impact of Brexit in particular was highlighted, with many firms reporting concerns on practical issues such as how to get export goods to customers in the event of a no-deal Brexit. Members broadly endorsed the message coming out of the business survey that many companies are refocusing on domestic markets and that there is significant pent-up investment due to ongoing uncertainty.

2.4 BCG members provided **feedback on other key issues** raised by the businesses they represent. In summary:

- A range of support is available from FE colleges to support **investment in skills**. Louise Tearle will provide an overview of this support at a future meeting.
- **Commercial lending** to businesses is currently at record high post-recession levels
- There has been a notable **dip in confidence**, related to Brexit and fluctuating markets and also a lack of confidence among businesses in the political system
- Yorkshire Universities are undertaking an analysis of the region's **higher education institutions' economic impact** and are considering how the universities can broaden and deepen their role as anchor institutions
- There are concerns about the potential impact of Brexit and the forthcoming Augur Review on **university funding**
- The Federation of Small Businesses is undertaking a campaign to reduce late payments, which have a significant detrimental impact on **small firms** and a report on the positive impact small businesses have on their communities
- Businesses remain eager to see progress on **devolution** in the region

2.5 BCG members were provided with updates on the emerging Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) for West and North Yorkshire and the Skills Commission being led by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority. Members are keen to be closely involved in the development of both pieces of work and workshop sessions will be organised in June to begin a process of ongoing engagement with members. In relation to the LIS in particular, the importance of language was noted and in particularly framing the strategy in terms that are meaningful

for businesses. It was noted that “productivity” in particular is not a term that resonates with many businesses.

- 2.6 The role of the BCG was discussed, with those members in attendance stressing the important link the group provides between the LEP and the business community. It was agreed that discussions are needed with those members who do not routinely attend so that the group fulfils its role as a two-way communications channel to influence LEP policy and make businesses in the region aware of the support available.
- 2.7 The next BCG meeting will take place on 6 June and will focus primarily on workshop sessions to seek members’ initial views on the LIS and Skills Commission.

Communications and marketing update

- 2.8 The Combined Authority and LEP secured significant media coverage in March. Roger Marsh and Cllr Hinchcliffe both made national television appearances speaking about Brexit and rail services respectively. The One Yorkshire Conference, which was led by the Combined Authority, attracted significant coverage, as did the City Region’s MIPIM delegation which generated 45 news stories and increased social media followers. Media targets for 2018/19 were exceeded, and the volume of coverage exceeded 2018 figures in every month.
- 2.9 Communications and marketing activity has been more limited in April and May as a result of local and European election purdah but business planning for 2019/20 is well underway. Priority activities for the coming year include:
 - Communications and engagement support for the Local Industrial Strategy, LEP merger, Skills Commission and clean growth agenda
 - High-profile strategic communications and advocacy campaigns in support of the NP11 agenda and the region’s rail priorities
 - Marketing campaigns continuing to raise the region’s profile nationally and internationally building on the success of Channel 4
 - Campaigns to promote business growth, skills and export support from the LEP and its partners, with a number of new skills campaigns due to launch later in the year
 - Development of a new LEP website, due to launch in early summer 2019
 - Communications activity and campaigns illustrating the LEP and Combined Authority’s positive impact on the region, in particular showcasing the impact of the LEP Growth Deal five years since it was secured

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 None.

4. Legal Implications

4.1 None.

5. Staffing Implications

5.1 None.

6. External Consultees

6.1 None.

7. Recommendations

7.1 That LEP Board members note the contents of this report.

7.2 That members offer comments on the business challenges and issues raised by BCG members in section 2.4 and appropriate responses.

8. Background Documents

8.1 None.

9. Appendices

9.1 None