

Stephen Jones  
Director of Cities and Local Growth Unit  
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18 March 2020

Dear Stephen

We are seeking your support in helping us respond to the challenges posed by COVID-19. Our concerns are particularly focussed on two areas, firstly our ability in the short term to deliver projects, specifically those in our Growth Deal programme, and secondly our ability to support business via our LEP.

### **Growth Deal delivery**

We and our partners are adhering closely to government and Public Health England advice, and we have been considering the impact of this on the delivery of our projects and programmes:

1. At this point we expect there will be a slowdown and loss of productivity and delays to project delivery over the coming months from our council and other external partners, consultants and contractors.
2. With regards partners and consultants, we are expecting a great deal of working from home, which is likely to mean a delay to submission of business cases and therefore a delay through our assurance process and starts on site.
3. With regards contractors, it is very difficult to know how work on site will be affected and we can only wait and see how this plays out. But it is realistic to expect that some delays are likely and we expect that some contractors may not be able to fulfil their commitments due to staff shortages.
4. With regards our reporting to BEIS on Growth Deal performance, we will work very closely with Combined Authority colleagues and partners, but we may see a delay in claims and progress reports being made to us, which will have a knock on effect in terms of what we can report to you. This is a concern as we approach the end of year. We would ask therefore for some flexibility and relaxing of returns deadlines in order for us to manage the situation.

As self isolation, illness, caring responsibilities and working from home increases we are anticipating a significant effect on project and programme delivery.

If you have had discussions with regards extending reporting deadlines, or with other LEPs in terms of managing possible delays to the programme, it would be appreciated if you could share outcomes with us.

Furthermore, this it is likely to affect our spend and outputs for this financial year and next financial year. Any flexibility that you could give us, such as allowing spend into financial year 2021/22, and relaxing claim deadlines would be greatly appreciated at this time.

### **Role of LEPs at present time**

The second issue is regarding the substantial contribution that LEPs can make towards supporting businesses and the economy through the coming crisis. The LEP is uniquely placed to provide understanding and confidence to businesses and communities, as well as providing direct practical support. We are flexible and adaptable and stand ready to re-orientate our work to assist the government in supporting business and the economy in the months ahead. LEP Growth Hubs provided a critical channel of communications and intelligence both to and from government, as we prepared to leave the EU. This ensured businesses across the country had trusted information at the right time and in the right way. This is a role we are well practised at and stand ready to perform again, in response to the challenge of COVID-19. The LEP network has already written to Simon Clarke MP to set out this offer, and this letter is attached. We would be grateful to discuss how these matters may be put into practice in the Leeds City Region.

If easier to discuss please give me a call. Or if you need further information, please let me know.

I will keep you informed of the situation.

Yours sincerely

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cc.

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