

Minutes of a meeting of the East Midlands Freeport Board held on 19 June 2024 at Leicestershire County Council, County Hall, Glenfield.

PRESENT

Nora Senior – Independent Chair

Landowners/Developers

Phil Canning – Uniper
Andrew Pilsworth - SEGRO
Peter Ralston – Goodman
Ioan Reed-Aspley – East Midlands Airport
Frank Robotham – Maritime Transport

Local Authorities

Mr Lee Breckon CC – Leicestershire County Council
Councillor Abby Brennan – Rushcliffe Borough Council
Councillor Keith Girling – Nottinghamshire County Council
Councillor Keith Merrie – North West Leicestershire District Council
Councillor Tony King – Derbyshire County Council
Councillor Stephen Taylor – South Derbyshire District Council

Accountable Body Officers

John Sinnott – Chief Executive
Nick Wash – Head of Service, Finance
Gemma Duckworth – Senior Democratic Services Officer

Also in Attendance

DLUHC Official
Joe Battye – Derbyshire County Council
Wayne Bexton – Nottinghamshire County Council
Gemma Dennis – Rushcliffe Borough Council
Katie Greenhalgh, Green Growth, Innovation and Skills Lead, East Midlands Freeport (for item 7)
Richard Grice – East Midlands Combined Authority
Richard Hiscoke, Bevan Brittan
Paul Miller – Senior Programme Manager, East Midlands Freeport
Tom Newman-Taylor – Chief Executive, East Midlands Freeport
Allison Thomas – North West Leicestershire District Council

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Neil Clarke, Steve Griffiths and Julie Rossiter.

1.	<u>Declarations of Interest.</u>	
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	<p>The Chair invited members who wished to do so to declare an interest in respect of items on the agenda.</p> <p>No declarations were made.</p>	
2.	<p><u>Minutes.</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Board meeting held on 17 May 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.</p>	
3.	<p><u>Action Log.</u></p> <p>The Board NOTED the list of outstanding and completed actions since the last meeting.</p>	
4.	<p><u>MAG Update.</u></p> <p>The Board received an update from Manchester Airports Group.</p>	
5.	<p><u>Chair's Update.</u></p> <p>The Chair provided the following update on activity since the last meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A meeting of the Collaboration Forum, as previously discussed at the Board, had taken place with East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) officers. • Discussion had taken place about the EMCCA Mayor's role on the Board and ways to bring EMCCA closer aligned with the Freeport, as had been proposed through the Board Effectiveness Review. • It was noted that both Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire County Councils had expressed that they wished to remain as members of the EMF Board under any scenario. If the Mayor also became a full member of the Board, it would be necessary to explore options for inviting an additional private sector member to join the Board to ensure a balance across the sectors. 	
6.	<p><u>CEO Update.</u></p> <p>The CEO emphasised the need to finalise the governance documents and stated that an urgent meeting with the Billing Authorities was required. This would be arranged.</p>	Billing Authorities
7.	<p><u>Skills Plan.</u></p>	

	<p>The Board received a presentation which provided an update on the work undertaken on skills and set out the proposed objectives and principles for taking this agenda forward. Some specific proposals around immediate next steps were highlighted, including seeking a strategic skills partnership.</p> <p>It was the aim to have a clear plan of activity to 2031, with a focus on early interventions and quick wins alongside developing EMF's longer term approach. A Strategic Skills Partnership would be commissioned, in particular to work with communities in disadvantaged areas to promote jobs within the Freeport boundary. Support would be sought, especially from the private sector members, both in the way of financial assistance and in kind. A further update would be provided to a future meeting of the Board with a more detailed proposition and a business case around funding.</p> <p>Members agreed that the skills agenda was fundamentally important and that work needed to happen now given long lead times.</p> <p>The strategic skills partnership was a good initiative and presented an opportunity to promote the Freeport to local communities, particularly those that were hardest to reach.</p> <p>It was felt that the plan was aspirational, but further information would still be required and this needed to be very clearly focused.</p> <p>It was also suggested that the plan linked with EMCCA's vision and there should be work undertaken to ensure there was no duplication. As the EMCCA did not include Leicestershire, discussions would also need to take place with the successor to the Leicester & Leicestershire Local Enterprise Partnership. The delivery team confirmed that these conversations were taking place and a skills group had been established, covering relevant stakeholders across the Freeport area.</p> <p>It was noted that for skill levels to rise in specific areas, it would be necessary to invest in infrastructure, for example public transport and childcare.</p> <p>A comment was made that retaining people and educating them in the region was key. However, it was felt that the focus should not just be around the private sector; the public sector also had potential skills shortages.</p> <p>The Board AGREED:</p>	
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	<p>a) with the recommended objectives, principles and role for EMF – that EMF had an important role to play on skills, but this should be well focused, linked to the success of its sites and target sectors, and aligned (not conflicting or duplicating) with wider regional efforts;</p> <p>b) to support the delivery of early interventions while the plan is developed further, noting that allocations are included in the operational budget to support delivery of these actions; specifically to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support more detailed analysis to identify specific areas within the Freeport boundary in need of targeted support • Develop plans for a strategic skills partnership • Develop a business case to secure private sector member support for the partnership ahead of the 2026 levy • Engage stakeholders through a Skills Working Group and comms plan • Utilise a skills expert on a short-term basis, supporting development of the plan • Continue to work with EMCCA to identify skills gaps and map these against provision within the region. 	
8.	<p><u>Branding and Marketing Update.</u></p> <p>The Board received a presentation from Form Brands Studio, who had been developing a new brand for EMF. Members fully endorsed the new branding, which would be launched in the near future.</p> <p>Various comments were made around images/photography used in the presentation (for example, making them more distinctly East Midlands), which were noted by Form Brands Studio and the delivery team.</p> <p>Consideration should also be given to aligning with other inward investment work to show consistency with the regional offer.</p> <p>A query was raised around the proposed bespoke typeface that had been used in the branding and how this could be used by other Board members. Consideration would be given to this, but assurance was given that there were other, similar fonts that could be utilised.</p> <p>The Board NOTED the update.</p>	
9.	<u>Board Effectiveness Review.</u>	

	<p>The Board was presented with final proposals arising from the Board Effectiveness Review. In summary, the recommendations were for the Board to meet bi-monthly (once the governance documents were signed) and for the Operational Forum to have a stronger role, meeting in the months between the Board meetings. In terms of membership, the current arrangement was working, and a standing invitation for local authority chief executives or their senior representatives to attend as observers had already been introduced. Further consideration was being given to how to best align with the EMCCA.</p> <p>In terms of subcommittees, a number had been removed and the new Committees would focus on specific functions over which the Board would have oversight. These would be chaired by Directors/their delegates. There would also be Advisory Groups, which would provide focus to specific projects and sites. It was felt that site-specific working groups required careful thought and interplay with existing groups.</p> <p>The Public Sector Directors Group should be clearly delineated from the Board, given the importance of avoiding any conflicts of interest where making decisions around public funds.</p> <p>A comment was made that, as there were still lots of issues to resolve, monthly Board meetings should continue and the meetings already scheduled would still go ahead. This would be the case for the immediate future, and going forward it would be possible to consider meetings every six weeks or paperless Board meetings every other month. Members felt that many of the reports presented to the Board were too lengthy and it was therefore the intention to make them briefer.</p> <p>In terms of Task and Finish Groups, the Board would be informed of these on a regular basis.</p> <p>The Board AGREED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) the implementation of the recommendations at Annex A to the report (with the exception of the move to bi-monthly meetings post governance sign-off), including the proposed changes to the subcommittee structure at Annex B;b) that the question of Board frequency would be revisited once the subcommittees had been established and meeting regularly. If at that point the Board decided that it should	
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	continue to meet monthly, then the Operational Forum would be removed altogether and alternate Board meetings could be paperless.	
10.	<p><u>Quarterly Financial Update.</u></p> <p>The Board received a presentation on the quarterly financial update. It was noted that a risk had arisen around set up costs (before EMF had been fully established) and whether VAT should have been added, despite Leicestershire County Council directly contracting with the consultant supplier. This would add a potential £340,000 to the costs and advice was being sought, although there would be no impact on operational budgets. VAT was now being added as standard. The position would be confirmed ahead of the next quarterly update.</p> <p>A query was raised around loan interest. The opportunity to offset the loan interest against any interest made on seed capital in the Accountable Body's bank account would be explored, particularly if funds were sitting in the account for a long period of time. The rate of 1% below base for interest on any pooled retained business rates should also be reviewed as this was felt to be low. It would perhaps be necessary to revisit the loan agreement to achieve this.</p> <p>The Board NOTED the quarterly financial update at June 2024.</p>	<p>NW/AR</p> <p>NW/TN-T</p>
11.	<p><u>Procurement.</u></p> <p>The Board was presented with a summary of the Freeport's current approach to procurement, along with the proposed changes. The basic proposition was to follow public procurement rules. Approval would be sought for the final procurement policy and strategy in the autumn, but any comments on the suggested approach should be sent to Tom Newman-Taylor or Paul Miller.</p>	ALL
12.	<p><u>TSO Update – Uniper.</u></p> <p>The Board received an update from Uniper on recent activity.</p>	
13.	<p><u>Date of Next Meeting.</u></p> <p>The Board was reminded that the Strategy Day was due to take place on 9 July.</p> <p>The next meeting of the Board was scheduled to take place on 10 September at 2.00pm at a venue to be confirmed.</p>	

1.00 – 4.00pm

19 June 2024

Chair