

## **MEETING OF THE BERKSHIRE LOCAL TRANSPORT BODY (BLTB) – THURSDAY 13 JULY 2023**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Stephen Brown, Chief Executive Officer, Slough Borough Council**

### **Item 2: Introduction to Berkshire Local Transport Body – Its Role and Purpose**

#### **Context – Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership Role.**

1. (Thames Valley) Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) is a business-led, public-private partnership entrusted with public funds to play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and job creation, improve infrastructure and raise workforce skills in Berkshire. It has been tasked by government to focus on five key activities:

#### **Develop Economic Strategy**

2. Most recently the development of Berkshire economic Recovery and Renewal Plan to 2025-6 (BRRP) agreed by Berkshire Leaders' Group (BLG) in February 2021, superseding the previously agreed Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (adopted by BLG in November 2019) and the Strategic Economic Plan (adopted by BLG in 2016). The LEP also develops Berkshire Skills Reports (most recent published in 2022), Business in Berkshire Reports (most recent published in autumn 2022 for 2021/22), Sector Propositions and Economic Briefings.

#### **Coordination**

3. To bring together partners from the private, public and third sectors to implement the BRRP Implementation Plan and to identify and support activity pan-Berkshire which secures economic benefits.

#### **Allocation of Funds**

4. To identify and develop investment opportunities, prioritising the award of capital funding (Local Growth and Getting Building Funds and Rates Retention Pilot capital schemes), and monitor and evaluate the impacts of activities to improve productivity across the local economy.

#### **Advocacy**

5. To collaborate with a wide range of local partners, stakeholders, local and national government to act as an informed and independent voice for Berkshire to advocate for and promote the area.

#### **Economic Growth**

6. To support businesses (primarily SMEs) and skills. For businesses this is to offer government funded, impartial support services and expert advice to entrepreneurs, start-ups, and established businesses in Berkshire, and driving mutually beneficial collaboration between entities. The LEP delivers the government Growth Hub contract to support SME business across the area and has UKSPF funds from the six local authorities to provide pre-start-up, accelerator and scale-up support to SMEs. For skills, this is to deliver Skills Bootcamps funded by DfE and the Careers Enterprise Company contract for Berkshire.
7. Berkshire LEP behaves in accordance with an Assurance Framework, which details the arrangements that ensure public money is being managed effectively. The Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles) underpin the Framework.

## **Berkshire Local Transport Body**

8. The Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB) was formally established in March 2013, so has now been in existence for over 10 years. Throughout that time, it has been chaired by Councillor Tony Page, from Reading Borough Council.
9. It was established in response to a request from the Department for Transport to oversee funding for major transport schemes that was devolved to LTBs from April 2015. The Department for Transport (DfT) provided comprehensive guidance that LTBs would be voluntary partnerships between Local Authorities, LEPs and other optional organisations. To comply with this guidance the Berkshire LTB is coterminous with the boundaries of Berkshire LEP, which in turn is coterminous with the six Berkshire unitary authorities. The structure and membership of the LTB used the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum's model as its foundation.
10. An Assurance Framework for transport schemes, which is separate but complementary to the LEPs own Assurance Framework, was signed off by the DfT in November 2017 and is kept under review as part of the formal relationship between the LEP and the BLTB.
11. BLTB Membership consists of six elected members (usually the lead member for transport or related portfolio), and up to six private sector representatives recruited and appointed by the LEP. The work of the BLTB is itself informed by the Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum (BSTF).
12. The BLTB and the BSTF have the same membership, which deploys either as a publicly accountable Joint Committee (the BLTB) or as the transport policy arm of the LEP acting for the six local authorities (the BSTF). The BLTB and BSTF run consecutively and meet up to four times a year (in 2022 they met three times).
13. The BLTB is chaired by a local authority representative Councillor agreed by the BLTB and is a public meeting which is hosted by Slough Borough Council (SBC) Democratic Services although the Secretariat function, other than production of formal minutes for BLTB, is undertaken by the LEP, including agreement of agendas with BLTB Chair and the six local authority lead Officers and production of papers.
14. The vice chair of the BLTB is a LEP appointed private sector representative, who also serves as the BSTF Chair. By virtue of this role, they are also appointed as a non-executive director to the LEP Board. The LEP undertakes all Secretariat duties for BSTF although the meeting is hosted on the SBC Democratic Services Teams system.
15. The BLTB has evolved over the past 10 years in response to the changing roles of both local authorities and LEPs in delivering major transport infrastructure in Berkshire. There has been an increasing role in the advocacy and the development of strategic transport and infrastructure schemes with a range of strategic partners, including Department for Transport and other central Government Departments, Network Rail, Train Operating Companies and National Highways. This has enabled BLTB to demonstrate the ongoing need to represent and lobby for investment in Berkshire in major transport infrastructure as well as maintaining the Major Transport Scheme Pipeline.

## **BLTB Investment Achievements**

16. The LEP has received Government Core Grant funding to provide a strategic economic view on transport and infrastructure. As a result, Berkshire LEP has played a strategic role in advocacy and promotion of infrastructure interventions that enhance connectivity and support the Berkshire economy.
17. The BLTB was initially designated as the competent body to prioritise, invest in, and oversee transport capital schemes on behalf of the LEP. This has enabled the LEP to invest £135m of delegated Local Growth Fund (LGF) and locally secured Business Rates Retention Pilot (BRRP) monies in transport projects across Berkshire. This has contributed to the leverage of additional 60% private investment of £125m and major investment in all of Berkshire's main towns to enable development and regeneration. 46% of the funding available has been spent on Sustainable infrastructure including:
  - Active travel £6.9m (4% of capital investment by the LEP)
  - Regeneration £7.5m (4% of capital investment by the LEP)
  - Mass Rapid Transit/ Park & Ride/Buses £39.9m (21% of capital investment by the LEP)
  - Railway £30.7m (17% of capital investment by the LEP)
  - Highway Improvements £27.7m (15% of capital investment by the LEP)
18. This has included seven rail station upgrades, a new rail station (Reading Green Park) three park & ride sites, mass rapid transit routes in Reading and Slough, bus systems and active travel initiatives.

## **BLTB Changing Role**

19. A change of policy direction in Government in 2020/21 saw the move to centrally held funding for future infrastructure and transport projects which are open to local authorities to bid for in competitions such as the Levelling Up Fund. As such the requirement for Berkshire LEP to provide infrastructure and transport strategic support has been wound down and at the end of 2021/22 Government reduced the level of Core Grant and ceased requiring LEPs to deliver on this activity other than oversight and monitoring of LGF/GBF projects to completion.
20. For financial year 2022/23 the local authorities agreed to make an additional one-off voluntary contribution to the LEP to cover the reduction in Core Grant so that it could maintain support at the same level as previously. The Core Grant provided to LEPs has further for 2023/24, reflecting that there are fewer capital projects left to complete by end March 2024 and the change in policy direction from local determination and allocation to national competitions to secure public funds for capital investment.
21. Following a review by the Berkshire Place Making Board (an Officer Group) it was decided to locally fund the LEP to provide a pared down Transport & Infrastructure support function primarily focussing on maintaining the BLTB and BSTF plus attendance a new Senior Officers Highways Group.
22. BLTB is required to continue to monitor within budgetary constraints strategically important developments via DfT, National Highways, the rail companies, Transport for the South East and the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group. BLTB will also continue to work with its partners to identify and prioritise suitable schemes to build a future investment pipeline for the area.