



Minutes of the St Helens Growth Board

10:00–12:30, Monday 29 January 2024
St Helens Town Hall

Board Members in Attendance:

Board Member (Deputy)	Role	Organisation
Councillor David Baines	Chair	Leader of St Helens Borough Council
Aston Fuller (deputising for Richard Katz)	General Manager	Glass Futures
Ruth Du Plessis)	Director of Public Health	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Kate Groucutt	Portfolio Holder for Economy, Business and Skills	St Helens Borough Council
Lisa Harris	Executive Director of Place Services	St Helens Borough Council
John Downes	Chief Executive	Langtree
Councillor Richard McCauley	Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Planning	St Helens Borough Council
Tracy Mawson	Chief Executive	St Helens Chamber of Commerce
Liz Walls	(Super Curriculum) Assistant Principal	Carmel College
Simon Pierce	Principal & Chief Executive	St Helens College
Jane Beardsworth	Senior Manager, North	Arts Council England
Neil Syder	Managing Director	NSG
Clare Richards	Senior Partnership and Business Development Manager	Homes England
Kath O'Dwyer	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Steve Coffey	Chief Executive	Torus

Guests in Attendance:

Aileen Jones – Executive Director Investment and Delivery, Liverpool City Region

Observers in Attendance:

Vicky Hardcastle – Team Manager PR & Media Communications, St Helens Borough Council

James Morley – Senior Scrutiny Officer, St Helens Borough Council

Local Authority Representatives in Attendance:

Mary Jefferson – Head of Regeneration & Growth, St Helens Borough Council

Robert Gatensbury - Programme Lead, St Helens Borough Council

Rachael Buckley - Partnerships Officer, St Helens Borough Council

1. WELCOME – CHAIR

The Chair welcomed Board Members (and those deputising)

1a. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Board Members:

Board Member	Role	Organisation
Neil Hargreaves	Managing Director	Knauf Insulation
Phil Mayall	Managing Director	Muse, ECF Partnership
Hazel James	Owner and Managing Director	Brendon International Ltd
Paul Nolan	Director	Mersey Forest
Sean Traynor	Director of Strategic Growth	St Helens Borough Council

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. SPOTLIGHT ON - LCRCA

Aileen Jones from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) presented information relating to the role of the LCRCA (CA) in the St Helens economy, the way St Helens plays a role in the City Region and some of the projects relating to St Helens that the CA are currently involved with. LCRCA's vision is for a "fairer, stronger, cleaner city region – where no one is left behind". Broadly, the role of the CA is to invest in housing, transport, skills, business support, innovation, and digital connectivity. Aileen predicted a further devolution of powers, responsibilities and funding streams in the near future.

Aileen provided an overview of the LCRCA Strategic Investment Fund which manages and coordinates the various sources of funding that come into the Combined Authority. Insofar as possible, the CA looks to invest funds into "Good Growth", i.e., schemes that support the ambition for a fairer, stronger, cleaner City Region.

An overview of the aims and objectives of the Freeports was provided, informing the Board that the LCR is one of twelve UK Freeports appointed by the Department of Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Following the presentation, the following points were made during discussion:

- Benefits of devolution were starting to be realised, it was suggested that lower investment and fewer projects would have happened under previous arrangements. The aim was to invest and to bring further investment into the Borough rather than have the proceeds of investment leaving the Borough.
- A skilled workforce is required to be able to maximise local take up of the jobs of the future.
- Life Science Investment is an opportunity that moves St Helens into a new sector. Wages for people in this sector are better than some of the other sectors currently employing people in the Borough.
- A skills plan in relation to the Investment Zone is needed. STEM Skills should form part of this.
- The Growth Board should play a role in supporting SMEs in the Borough to access funding streams like those available through LCRCA.
- A strong cultural education can play a key role in teaching critical thinking skills. The culture lead regeneration of St Helens Town Centre, converting the town centre to be leisure rather than retail focused and creative opportunities through World of Glass would support this.

- Skills Academy for Health and Social Care was important and there may be opportunities to replicate the model to develop skills in other sectors.
- The local labour force is one of the key factors businesses look for when considering where to locate – alongside the benefits of the location and financial incentives. E.g., Langtree increased the percentage of staff based locally from 10%-14%.
- In the health sector there was a desire to enable local businesses to apply for large NHS contracts in the area. Significant procurement opportunities coming out of the NHS and local businesses should be part of that market.
- Housing developments coming forward were positive. Good quality housing is key to people staying healthy enabling them to develop themselves and be productive.
- Carmel College's most popular subjects were Maths, Chemistry and Biology with students coming from a wide area into the Borough to learn. It was suggested there needed to be more degree apprenticeships offered locally to keep people in the region. Evidence suggests, people who leave the borough to study are less likely to return.
- Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities were leading the field on devolution and had been given larger single payments rather than having to bid for extra funding streams with the LCRCA is arguing for the same. There was a hope a future Government would take this direction, but it was unclear what political parties currently had planned beyond the general election which was expected within the next 12 months.

Decision: The Board noted the presentation

4. HE & FE ENGAGEMENT

Simon Pierce provided a verbal report on St Helens College's position and student demographic:

- One of six colleges in the LCR with differences in relation to curriculum and skills development. Overlaps are in technical and vocational curriculum areas, to prepare people for work.
- Currently the largest provider of apprenticeships in the LCR with 900 at any one-time (including Knowsley Community College)
- In addition to apprenticeships, the College provided some higher education (HE) courses up to Level 6 and 7 and also delivered some training courses to businesses training their staff.
- Majority of learners enrolled at the College were from St Helens and most alumni stayed in the Borough.
- Whilst learners were from a wide range of demographics, students were predominantly from challenged communities, with the College dealing with a significant number of students with social support needs/mental health issues.
- A significant proportion of courses offered to adult learning was for those with no or low qualification levels, with a large number retaking GCSE Maths and English.
- A good proportion of students were those studying English as a Second Language (ESOL)
- Funding was mainly from Department for Education (DfE), with the LCRCA providing a significant amount of funding also.
- LCR funding for adult learning was more flexible than national funding.
- Employers whose apprentices did training through the College paid apprenticeship levy to the College where they met the threshold.
- In terms of costs, smaller businesses made some contributions to costs of training apprentices with other students paying via the Student Loans Company.

- Funding is a challenge for the College with the preference to have funding in a single pot in comparison to the variety of separate streams the College was currently accessing.
- The College was in receipt of three-year funding deals which meant a focus on the medium rather than long term. This makes it difficult to plan ahead and offer the training to develop the skills businesses need from potential employees.
- The College had 600 staff however it was difficult to recruit and retain staff – financially people could earn more working in a trade rather than teaching it. Keeping the College estate up to date was also a cost challenge.
- Teaching spaces were up to date and the College was good at working with employers to co-develop courses to meet their needs however some industries change quickly so keeping up to date was a challenge.

It was suggested that there was low aspiration in the Borough or in some cases young people had high aspirations but low expectations for them to have the opportunities or capabilities to achieve those aspirations. The College offered advice and guidance on career options and pathways and was trying to build people's confidence and expectations of what they can achieve through diligence in studies. As well as being a vital provider of skills development, the College contributed substantially to the St Helens Town Centre economy with a lot of footfall provided by students and staff.

Of the Growth Board, Simon requested that strategic leadership be provided through clear overarching strategies regarding skills needs allowing the College to develop its offer around skills where and when they were needed. It was suggested there needed to be a Children and Young People's Strategy for the Borough that partners buy into and can plan around. Simon suggested that the College was always able to make students "work ready" and that a lot of what makes people work ready is the early stages of actually doing a job. Employers needed to appreciate this and recruit and nurture staff on this basis as well as offer work experience opportunities for students.

Following the verbal report there was a discussion and the following points were made:

- The Inequalities Commission had recently engaged with over 1000 young people regarding their aspirations. A lack of confidence, lack of opportunity, lack of resources all contributed towards a lack of aspiration. It was suggested that unless young people can see the opportunities that are available, they won't consider them, so opportunities needed to be made more visible. The survey found that young people value mentoring, and basic life skills training as well as work experience, mental health support and to learn in a fun environment.
- People in the Borough needed upskilling so that they could take the jobs becoming available rather than people from outside the borough commuting in to take the jobs.
- The College needed access to employers and potential businesses coming into the Borough to work with them to make sure the College was producing skills workers they can use. The earlier this happens the more time there is to implement the changes and make sure skilled people are there when needed.
- The COVID-19 Pandemic had created long term impacts on young people's mental health having impacted on their experience at school. The cost-of-living crisis had also impacted students and their health and wellbeing. The College supported a lot of young people with very basic things such as clothing, toiletries, and travel.
- More engagement with Higher Education was needed. The Borough needed to engage with Liverpool Universities and beyond to link their students with jobs in the Borough or ensure they were delivering the courses that matched the jobs requirement for the Borough.
- Pastoral support and engagement is needed for young people entering the workforce. Hybrid and remote working whilst opening up more opportunities

requires consideration to ensure young people can integrate into a business, make connections with their colleagues and learn from them.

- Businesses needed to do more to make sure they had an effective approach to integrating new employees and helping them develop once they enter an organisation.
- It would be useful to have data in relation to the number of jobs in the Borough alongside the number of college/university graduates in the borough to see where the gaps are to provide a focus for work by the Growth Board and matching jobs with skills development.

Decision: The Board noted the verbal report

5. GROWTH BOARD PLEDGE

Cllr Kate Groucutt provided an overview of the proposed Pledge for the Growth Board to adopt. It was proposed that the Pledge include:

- Commitment to decent jobs for local people,
- Supporting local businesses through supply chains,
- Commitment to achieving Net Zero, and
- Inspiring the next generation.

Through the Growth Board and the People's Board, there were several anchor institutions that could be engaged in the pledge with significant local influence as key employers and service providers.

It was suggested that the Pledge be signed by organisations involved in the Growth Board initially then encourage others to join in. The Pledge should enable stakeholders to demonstrate a commitment to the causes listed without being too onerous or binding. Consideration should also be given to how the Pledge and the work of the Growth Board could be presented to the public (e.g., via a PR Event). It was suggested that this could be an opportunity to send a clear message to residents and businesses about the purpose of the Growth Board and how it was going to make a difference.

Members were asked to share what their organisations already had in relation to social value strategies and consider how the Growth Board Pledge would compliment those.

During discussion the following points were made:

- The audience for the Pledge would be the public and businesses outside of the Growth Board. It was important for the public to see collaboration with the private sector on such initiatives rather than being just the Council.
- It would be difficult to have a simple message that would resonate with everyone. It was suggested it may be more beneficial to have slightly different messages for different sections of the Borough (e.g., businesses, young people). This could be facilitated by different organisations leading on different messages (e.g., St Helens RLFC could be engaged to lead on a message to young people).
- It was suggested young people didn't just want general aspirations they would want to know how they were going to benefit from the Pledge more directly.
- The Council does have a variety of communication methods to reach different groups with various messages that it publishes and would be able to implement a range of communications for the Growth Board Pledge. Partners would also be expected to contribute to distributing the messages of the Growth Board.
- The Growth Board would be engaged in shaping Place Based Marketing when development of new content was commissioned.

Decision: Further consideration be given to a draft Pledge to be brought back to the Board at a future meeting.

Action: Re-draft Pledge to include specific focus on Business and Youth

6. GROWTH BOARD PROJECTS

A presentation by Cllr Kate Groucutt provided an overview of possible projects that the Growth Board would initiate. Cllr Groucutt summarised the Inclusive Growth Strategy and the actions needed over the next five years to deliver this. Board Members were asked for further ideas for future work. Priorities from the Inclusive Growth Strategy, which the Growth Board was set up to help implement, included:

- Create training and employment opportunities.
- Maximise supply chain opportunities for local firms.
- Create conditions for scale and productivity growth in our businesses.
- Encourage entrepreneurship and new enterprises to start.
- Attract new businesses to invest and locate in the borough.

Considering the Inequalities Commission work mentioned earlier, the question of how training and employment opportunities are created was asked. The suggestion of a marketing campaign to promote what opportunities already existed in the Borough was made whilst considering how mental health issues presented a barrier to employment, and addressing the inequalities gap were also raised.

It was suggested that unless partner agencies engaged with directly contributing to delivering the action plan for the Growth Board there was a risk it would be left to the Council to do the work and due to the financial challenges, all local authorities were currently facing, the Council does not/will not have the resources to deliver such economic support and stimulus in future. Council needed to be a facilitator rather than a deliverer on Growth Board activity/action.

It was suggested that the Growth Board needed to look at what business and skills support exists already (e.g. Health Skills Academy) and consider how the Board could add value. If existing small local businesses could be encouraged to remain in the borough as they grow, this will increase demand for a skilled local workforce.

Decision: The Board noted the report

7. NEXT STEPS AND DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Board was informed that the proposed date for the next meeting was 10 May 2024. Board members would be informed about the arrangements for the next meeting closer to the date.

8. A.O.B.

No other business was raised.

The Chair invited any items under AOB and, with none being received, the Chair thanked all attendees before closing the meeting.