



Minutes of the St Helens Growth Board

10:00–12:00, Friday 24 May 2024
St Helens Town Hall

Board Members in Attendance:

Board Member (Deputy)	Role	Organisation
Councillor Richard McCauley	Chair and Portfolio Holder for Inclusive Growth and Regeneration	St Helens Borough Council
Lisa Harris	Executive Director of Place Services	St Helens Borough Council
Aston Fuller (deputising for Richard Katz)	General Manager	Glass Futures
Shirley Goodhew (deputising for Ruth Du Plessis)	Public Health Consultant	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Kate Groucutt	Portfolio Holder for Business, Culture and Leisure	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Anthony Burns	Leader of the Council	St Helens Borough Council
Neil Syder	Managing Director	Pilkington UK Ltd, NSG Group
Steve Coffey	Chief Executive	Torus
Paul Nolan	Director	Mersey Forest
Simon Pierce	Principal & Chief Executive	St Helens College
Hazel James	Owner and Managing Director	Brendon International Ltd
Clare Richards (deputising for Catherine Holmes)	Senior Partnership and Business Development Manager	Homes England
Stuart Rogers (deputising for Phil Mayall)	Project Director	Muse
Malcolm Jackson (deputising for John Downes)	Chief Operating Officer	Langtree

Guests in Attendance:

Andrew Deveney – Assistant Director of Investment, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority

Lynn Saunders – Operation Lead (Mental Health and Wellbeing, Suicide Prevention, City Health Care Partnership CIC)

Observers in Attendance:

James Morley – Senior Scrutiny Officer, St Helens Borough Council

Local Authority Representatives in Attendance:

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

Robert Gatensbury - Programme Lead, St Helens Borough Council

Rachael Buckley - Partnerships Officer, St Helens Borough Council

Mathew Thompson – Public Health Practitioner, St Helens Borough Council

Victoria Kehoe – Children’s Programme Coordinator, St Helens Borough Council

Melissa Halligan – Public Health Officer, St Helens Borough Council

1. WELCOME – CHAIR

The Chair, Councillor Richard McCauley welcomed Board Members (and those deputising)

1a. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Board Members:

Board Member	Role	Organisation
Liz Walls	Assistant Principal (Super Curriculum)	Carmel College
John Downes	Chief Executive	Langtree
Ruth du Plessis	Director of Public Health	St Helens Borough Council
Jane Beardsworth	Senior Manager North	Arts Council England
Phil Mayall	Managing Director	Muse
Neil Hargreaves	Managing Director	Knauf Insulation
Kath O’Dwyer	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

3. IMPACT ON THE CLOSURE OF ST HELENS CHAMBER AND ALTERNATIVE SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES

Cllr McCauley opened a discussion about the closure of St Helens Chamber of Commerce since the Growth Board’s previous meeting. It was suggested that whilst the closure of the Chamber had left a large gap in local business support there was a variety of support options open to new and small businesses. Examples included local Business Networking Groups and Liverpool Chamber, amongst others.

Mary Jefferson referred to some examples of other organisations fulfilling roles that the Chamber previously undertook. This included Halton & St Helens Voluntary Community Action, and St Helens Wellbeing Service which offered healthier lifestyles support. In addition, St Helens Cares offers social care and career support, and a range of business networks had either formed or expanded their offering since the closure of the Chamber. Cllr Groucutt stated that the Council could not get involved in the operation of any new Chamber that may be formed. However, it could provide support to local businesses or a new Chamber where it could, and Cllr Groucutt invited people considering taking on any (or all) roles that the former Chamber previously fulfilled, to come and engage with the Council. The Chamber had been expected to tender for the Council’s UKSPF business support contract before its closure.

Decision: The Board noted the discussion

4. INVESTMENT ZONE OVERVIEW FROM THE LCRCA

Andrew Deveney, Assistant Director of Investment at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, gave a presentation regarding the various Investment Zones that had been announced previously. It was explained that identified regions were initially awarded £80m over five years, with a further £80m over five years subsequent to the initial five years. This was announced by Government in Autumn 2023. The presentation detailed the plans for the initial £80m. No plans had yet been developed for the second £80m. Overall, there was an objective to create 8,000 jobs over the ten years of total funding, with a focus on Life Sciences.

Andrew outlined the current project pipeline, which included an initial 21 projects spanning five themes. The first seven projects had been shortlisted and were due to be approved in June 2024, including one in St Helens. Funding was being used to invest in construction and business support, with the St Helens site earmarked as a Manufacturing & Innovation Campus with stamp duty and business rates tax reliefs.

Andrew informed the Board that the next steps for the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority were to complete the commitment of the first £80m of funding, to understand the short-term impact on initial projects, then consider how the second £80m would be allocated.

Lisa Harris reiterated the Council's aim to make St Helens a place where life science and manufacturing businesses could scale up. Cllr McCauley referred to the Council's Inclusive Growth Strategy and desire for businesses in the area to recruit locally. Schools and colleges were being engaged with the aim to empower students to take the opportunities that were going to be created.

Decision: The Board noted the presentation

5. PRIORITIES OF THE GROWTH BOARD

Cllr Groucutt provided a verbal update on the development of priorities for the Growth Board that were agreed at a previous meeting. It was suggested that the key priorities from the Inclusive Growth Strategy be adopted by the Board with some additions/amendments based on feedback from the Board and also the closure of the Chamber. Cllr Groucutt provided an overview of four proposed priorities:

Create the conditions for scale and productivity growth in our businesses

- *Explore new programmes in digital and tech adoption and low carbon transition, with a focus on SMEs in manufacturing, engineering and construction.*
- *Create new business networks aimed at securing opportunities from major developments through collaboration and joint bidding.*

Create training and employment opportunities

- *Design and deliver a marketing campaign to raise awareness of the opportunities available across the borough, empowering and involving teaching staff and parents in communicating these messages.*
- *Explore a St Helens Borough Anchor Institutions Flexi-Apprenticeship Programme, whereby young people and older workers looking to retrain can work as an apprentice on 3-month placements in different organisations.*

The Board noted the proposed priorities and discussed how they could be taken forward individually. It was suggested that St Helens had some historical social challenges that impacted productivity in the area (e.g. high number of looked after children, significant mental health issues and high drug and alcohol use) that would need to be considered and addressed moving forward.

Decision: The Board noted the verbal report

6. MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE

An overview of the range of mental health services available to businesses in the Borough for their workforces was provided by representatives of the Public Health and NHS teams. An example of recent interventions in Rainhill was provided as a case study, detailing how suicide awareness training could be effective. Local residents and staff in local bars and restaurants had received suicide awareness training and been able to support a number of individuals who were found to have been considering suicide. With the initial support of those trained the people who were suffering from suicidal thoughts were able to get the help they needed.

The Co-op's Lea Green Distribution Centre was given as an example of an employer that incorporated mental health support into its workforce. The NHS services had collaborated with the company to train mental health first aiders within teams and established opportunities for employees to have face to face meetings with first aiders to discuss any issues. There is one mental health first aider for every 10 employees. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a certified course costing £230 each. It was suggested that few companies had MHFA, but it was seen as a key part of supporting employees to avoid absences due to mental health issues and maintained productivity. Carmel College was also an example of an organisation that invested in MHFA training for staff (also available to students). Board Members were asked what their organisations could do to increase engagement in supporting good mental health within businesses. A suggestion was made regarding workplace 'Health Charters' that focused on good employment and the priorities of the workforce. Board members were asked to consider whether mental health and suicide prevention training could be incorporated into their staff training programmes.

Cllr Burns reiterated the public health messages about poor mental health locally, the knock-on effect of unemployment and additional support for these individuals and families. It was suggested that it was vital for businesses to work with health services to help their staff maintain good mental health. There are a number of local charities and sports clubs that are good at supporting the mental health agenda.

Lisa Harris pointed out that one of the Council's performance indicators was showing that a significant proportion of long-term sickness (54%) was caused by mental health and that tackle this issue would be key to enabling more people to get back into the workplace and increase productivity in the Borough.

Decision: The Board noted the presentation

7. APPROACHES TO THE GROWTH BOARD PLEDGE

Cllr Groucutt provided a verbal update. The aim was to develop a pledge that all organisations could sign up to. The purpose of the pledge would be to inform the public about the Board and what the shared values of all organisations represented were. It was suggested that the idea of a pledge would be deferred for the time being as more clarity was needed regarding the shared values of the Board and what was expected from each member organisation. The Council's Communications Team could provide support with, and it would be considered ahead of the next meeting. Support from other marketing teams in other organisations would also be welcomed.

Decision: The Board noted the report

8. HORIZON SCANNING

Cllr McCauley opened a discussion about matters people were aware of that might be of interest to the Board.

Paul Nolan informed the Board that there were Bold Forest Investment opportunities which could be brought to the Board at a future meeting. Lisa Harris supported this and raised the question of how green spaces could be used to deliver on biodiversity net gain, which was a requirement for developments recently introduced by Government.

Clare Richards suggested a Homes England update could be provided to the next meeting. Steve Coffey informed the Board that Torus' Cowley Hill development was progressing with new housing.

Aston Fuller informed the Board that Glass Futures key construction was on course to be completed in 2024. Glass Futures was trying to link universities into opportunities in St Helens e.g. Cambridge University had some operators based at Glass Futures currently. They were also supporting scale ups and trying to encourage the University of Liverpool to have a campus in St Helens. Glass Futures was looking to give small businesses a place to start and grow and encourage them to stay local as they expanded. It was suggested it would be a major positive for the town to have a branch of University of Liverpool.

Cllr Groucutt provided an update on the future of the former St Helens Chamber building. The building was put up for sale by administrators but there were still some start-ups working there that would need to be relocated following a sale. The market for office buildings is currently quiet so the future of the building is unknown at present.

Decision: The Board noted the discussion

9. NEXT STEPS AND DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Board was informed that the proposed date for the next meeting had been 17 September 2024; however, feedback from some members was that the date was not suitable. A date of the 21 October 2024, 2pm – 4pm has been agreed.

10. A.O.B.

Vicky Kehoe, Children Programme Coordinator at St Helens Borough Council, informed the Board that a Children's version of the Borough Strategy had been developed. The St Helens Youth Cabinet had been consulted on strategy and agreed six top priorities from a shortlist developed through feedback from children and young people in the Borough. The six priorities were included in a declaration called 'Our Borough Too' which were:

1. Make sure no one goes hungry in St Helens
2. Make St Helens safer for young people.
3. More help for young people with mental health and wellbeing
4. More places for young people to go that are affordable and accessible.
5. Preparing young people for the future and helping them to achieve their ambitions.
6. Look after our environment and the climate, and ensure our Borough is clean and tidy.

Officers are working to map how Youth Council's priorities aligned with what is already being done in the Borough and identify gaps. The Youth Cabinet are also going to use some of their meetings to scrutinise progress.

Lisa Harris informed the Board that Council had secured from Government Long-term Plans for Town funding for Newton-le-Willows (£2m per year for 10 years to engage the local community). The Council is currently looking for local representatives to be members of the Newton Town Deal Board following recent appointment of its Chair. The Board was informed that the Chairs of the St Helens Town Centre and Newton Town Deal Boards would be invited onto the Growth Board.

Following the last of the any other business items, the Chair thanked all attendees before closing the meeting.