



# Minutes of the St Helens Growth Board

13:30-15:00, Monday 10 February 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	St Helens Borough Council
Kath O'Dwyer	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Kate Groucutt	Portfolio Holder for Economy, Business and Skills	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Anthony Burns	Leader of St Helens Borough Council	St Helens Borough Council
Shirley Goodhew (deputising for Ruth Du Plessis)	Public Health Consultant	St Helens Borough Council
Liz Walls	Assistant Principal (Super Curriculum)	Carmel College
Neil Syder	Managing Director	Pilkington UK Ltd, NSG Group
Paul Nolan	Director	Mersey Forest
Simon Pierce	Principal & Chief Executive	St Helens College
Hazel James	Owner and Managing Director	Brendon International Ltd
Steven Knowles	Director of Development Management	Muse

## Guests in Attendance:

Ian Dunkerley - Delivery Manager, Growth Company/St Helens Business Support  
Ava Saunders – Marketing and Events Executive, Growth Company/St Helens Business Support  
Rachel Wellens - Educational Programmes Manager, Inovus Medical  
Irene Kennedy – Educational Programmes Co-ordinator, Inovus Medical

## Secretariat in Attendance:

James Morley – Senior Scrutiny Officer, St Helens Borough Council

## Local Authority Representatives in Attendance:

Sean Traynor – Director of Strategic Growth, St Helens Borough Council  
Mary Jefferson – Head of Regeneration and Growth, St Helens Borough Council  
Rachael Buckley - Partnerships Officer, St Helens Borough Council  
Sarah Platt – Head of School Effectiveness and Improvement, 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
Steve Coffey	Chief Executive	Torus
Aston Fuller	General Manager	Glass Futures
John Downes	Chief Executive	Langtree
Catherine Holmes	Assistant Regional Director	Homes England
Jane Beardsworth	Senior Manager, North	Arts Council
Ruth du Plessis	Director of Public Health	St Helens Borough Council
Phil Mayall	Managing Director, Muse	English Cities Fund (ECF) partnership

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

## 3. CRADLE TO CAREER PARTNERSHIP

Sarah Platt provided an overview of the 'Cradle to Career' project that is currently being piloted in Parr. The project is currently in its second year with funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA). The Council is working with the LCRCA and Right to Succeed. The Board was briefed on the project to assess where Board members could contribute on three individual work streams.

Cradle to Career is a hyper-local project with equivalent projects ongoing in Halton, Knowsley, Sefton and Liverpool. The project purpose is to support young people through early steps through education to support their aspirations and motivations regarding future careers. All Local Authorities had identified areas that have high levels of deprivation to support people in greatest need.

The project is ready to launch following a consultation process with wraparound support provided to families as well as young people to ensure greater success in education which will hopefully provide greater career opportunities for young people. The consultation involves seven areas: primary schools/secondary schools, colleges, residents, community organisations, businesses, public sector and children and young people. The project was designed to provide bespoke support to the needs of young people with every child supported to succeed. The end goal of the project is to empower communities to succeed so that additional, external support can be stepped down and communities can self-sustain. During the consultation, a strong sense of community has been evident from across the residents of Parr.

There are three working groups within the project: education, community and family services. Each of the three working groups has their own aims. Measures for success include better outcomes in early years, primary and secondary education, reduced levels of children's social care intervention, and reduced youth justice service intervention. It is likely that individual projects within Cradle to Career will have their own success measures as well.

Board members were asked to consider whether they or their organisations could support with mentoring of young people or small businesses in Parr. Growing local businesses that could then support community projects and local people themselves would contribute to success of the project.

Board members were strongly encouraged to contact Council officers if they had any additional suggestions of how contributions to Cradle to Career could be made.

**Decision:** The Board noted the discussion and agreed to contact Council officers with any additional suggestions on how their organisations could support young people involved in the Cradle to Career initiative

#### **4. INOVUS LIFE SCIENCES EMBEDDED SKILLS PROGRAMME**

Mary Jefferson introduced Inovus, a UK based designer and manufacturer of medical supplies based in St Helens but trading both nationally and internationally. The Skills Programme, known officially as 'LCR Ignite' provides funding, to raise awareness of the various different life changing routes into life sciences for local students aged between 16-18. Career areas include engineering, sales, marketing, finance and product development. The aspiration is to offer highly skilled, well-paid jobs locally to young people to encourage them to build their careers in the borough (reducing the brain drain). The Growth Board was briefed on the programme to consider ways that Board members could provide support to this excellent programme.

Irene Kennedy informed Board members that the five-year project was currently in its first year as a pilot scheme, working with student focus groups at Carmel College and St Helens College to find out which careers they wanted to pursue. The pilot identified that young people are aspirational but are not always sure how to pursue their aspirations. The programme aims to give practical, hands-on experience as well as providing networking opportunities with businesses and prominent individuals from across the Borough. There were no academic prerequisites to access the programme and young people were chosen based on displaying the correct motivations through college (i.e. good attendance at college and enthusiasm for hands on experience).

The LCR Ignite pilot scheme commences with 24 students from Carmel College in February until May 2025, before being rolled out across other areas in the borough and wider within the Liverpool City Region.

The Skills Programme wished to introduce young people to a range of businesses and professionals, and Board members were invited to a range of events to in March and May such as a networking event, a showcase and awards ceremony.

Lisa Harris agreed that the Council would look to take part in the programme in some way and asked whether the programme was assuming a successful pilot. Rachel Wellens stated that the pilot would be evaluated and developed to be repeated. They were looking to extend the programme to students from St Helens College and larger groups of students from Carmel College. The next cohort was expected to take part in the programme in September 2025. The status of the programme would be clearer once the current pilot had been evaluated.

Liz Wells informed the Board that Carmel College had a lot of students from disadvantaged areas of St Helens and suggested that the programme was a good way to help them decide what they wanted to do with their careers.

Sean Traynor suggested that to maintain success of programmes such as these, providers needed to maintain contact with participants following the end of the programme to maintain momentum, keep their motivations up and avoid losing contact with them.

**Decision:** The Board noted the presentation, with Board members strongly encouraged to contact Officers to advise of availability to take part in the scheme

#### **5. UPDATE FROM GROWTH COMPANY ON ST HELENS BUSINESS SUPPORT**

Ian Dunkerley provided a presentation to the Board regarding the progress made to date by the Growth Company established to provide business support and business start-up services in St Helens. The Growth Company is a social enterprise with the purpose to enable growth and improve the lives of local people. The Growth Company is funded by UK Shared Prosperity Funding to promote individuals starting new businesses and support existing businesses to grow or overcome barriers. The company offers face to face meetings with business advisors. Users are requested to fill in a questionnaire to understand their business or idea and what aspirations are and what is currently stopping the business from starting/growing. Business advisors use their knowledge and links to other support mechanisms within the Liverpool City Region to support businesses. Requests for support included support bringing AI into the business, help accessing financing, marketing and tendering for contracts. Start Ups were offered online workshops focussed on mindset and marketing/financial support. The Growth Company's Start Up Advisor helped with setting up a business and beginning trading.

The Growth Company was launched in September 2025 and in that time had received 273 enquiries (40% were starts ups). The Growth Company has a bank of associates that could be drawn upon to offer additional support to businesses outside the support available for internal advisors. A St Helens Businesses WhatsApp Group has been established to help businesses support each other and create supply chains. A Start Up WhatsApp group has also been established to provide mutual support. 'Start up Sips' is an informal Friday morning coffee/tea and chat session offered by the company. The company also had a LinkedIn page that is growing.

To date 95% of the businesses supported were 'micro businesses' and there have not been many businesses supported that have current potential for significant growth. It was suggested that consideration may need to be given to the branding of the company to make it more appealing to companies with significant growth potential.

Reference was made to the [State of Growth in St Helens Report](#) that was published in Autumn 2024. The Board was requested to support the Growth Company with engagement from businesses with potential to grow and create significant numbers of jobs.

Sean Traynor stated that the Growth Company was established to plug the gap left by St Helens Chamber when it closed. At present, it is challenging for new companies to be established or grow. Business birth rates in the Borough are high but closure rates are high also. There is a desire locally from people to start their own businesses, but they need support to sustain and grow them. St Helens Borough is currently 303<sup>rd</sup> out of 317 local authorities for business rate income so there is a desire to growth local businesses to increase funding for the Council generated through Business Rates.

Simon Pierce asked whether the businesses that are being supported are interested in apprentices. Ian suggested that the time and cost of taking on apprentices is a barrier for small businesses. It was asked whether Board members could provide support by using apprenticeship levy contributions to help small businesses take on apprentices.

**Decision:** <sup>(OBJ)</sup> The Board noted the verbal report and the request to support small businesses in relation to apprenticeships

## 6. GROWTH BOARD PRIORITIES

Cllr Groucutt opened a discussion about the role of business networks in the Borough. The Inclusive Growth Strategy includes a desire to ensure there are strong networks to enable businesses to develop supply chains or work together to secure opportunities from major developments. The aim of networks

should be to raise awareness of business opportunities in the Borough and increase collaboration. There are a number of networks already operating in the area.

Lisa Harris suggested that it is positive to see that the private sector has filled a lot of the gaps in networking that have been left by the Chamber closing however there may still be gaps unsupported. Big businesses in the area may be better placed than the Council to engage with other businesses.

Hazel James suggested that an online portal knitting together all the different types of networks people or businesses could engage with based on their needs was something the Council or Growth Board could support with.

**Decision:** The Board noted the presentation and requested consideration of an online portal to support businesses wishing to engage in business networking

## **7. GROWTH BOARD ANNUAL REPORT**

Cllr McCauley informed the Board that the annual report brochure has been published, and hard copies were provided for Board members during the meeting. It was highlighted that there are currently some vacancies on the Board and asked Board members to consider who could be invited to fill those positions. The Chair requested that feedback on the annual review and how well the Board is operating be shared outside the meeting.

**Decision:** ~~(OBJ)~~ The Board noted the report and feedback on the annual review, Board effectiveness is invited by all Board members to the Partnerships Officer in advance of the next Board meeting

## **9. NEXT STEPS AND DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Rachael Buckley informed the Board that the proposed date for the next meeting is 29 April at 2:30pm-4:30pm. The Council is able to host the meeting at the Town Hall, but Board Members are asked to consider whether they would be able to offer alternative venues for future meetings.

**Decision:** Next Board meeting to be held at St Helens Town Hall. Board members to advise of other suitable venues for future meetings.

## **10. A.O.B.**

There was no other business.