

Minutes of a meeting of the East Midlands Freeport Board
Held on 18 December 2025, at 1.30pm, on Microsoft Teams.

PRESENT

Directors

Nora Senior – Independent Chair

Phil Canning – Uniper

Councillor Keith Merrie – North West Leicestershire District Council (NWLDC)

Andrew Pilsworth - SEGRO

Peter Ralston – Goodman

Councillor Robert Reaney – Derbyshire County Council (DCC)

Ioan Reed-Aspley – East Midlands Airport (EMA)

Frank Robotham – Maritime Transport

Julie Rossiter – Etwall Land Limited (ELL)

Councillor Stephen Taylor – South Derbyshire District Council (SDDC)

Councillor James Walker-Gurley – Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC)

Accountable Body Officers

Zafar Saleem – Assistant Chief Executive

Simone Hines – Director of Finance

Executive Delivery Team

Katie Greenhalgh – Head of Green Growth and Inclusion

Naomi Kwasa – Governance and Committees Lead

Paul Miller – Head of Operations and Programmes

Tom Newman-Taylor – Chief Executive

Also present

Adam Hill – Rushcliffe Borough Council

Joe Battye – Derbyshire County Council

Ben Green - SEGRO

Derek Higton – Nottinghamshire County Council

Edward Highfield – East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) (for the AB Transition Item)

Cllr Tony Saffell - North West Leicestershire District Council

Allison Thomas – North West Leicestershire District Council

MHCLG Representative

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Steve Griffiths, who was represented by Ioan Reed-Aspley, Mr Harrison Fowler and Cllr Neil Clarke.

	<p>The Chair welcomed Cllr Tony Saffell as an observer to the meeting and noted that he would soon be taking on the role of NWLDC's Director.</p>
2.	<p><u>Declarations of Interest</u></p> <p>The Chair invited members who wished to do so to declare an actual or perceived interest in respect of items on the agenda. No declarations were made.</p>
3.	<p><u>Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 27 November 2025</u></p> <p>The Minutes of the meeting on 27 November 2025 were AGREED as a correct record.</p> <p>The Chair noted that the amended minutes of the October Board meeting had been circulated and no further comments had been received. She requested any further amendments, none were noted. The Board AGREED the minutes of the meeting on 23 October 2025 as a correct record.</p>
4.	<p><u>Chair's Update</u></p> <p>The Chair confirmed that she had no verbal update to present due to the proximity with the previous meeting at which a comprehensive update was provided.</p>
5.	<p><u>Chief Executive's Update</u></p> <p>The Chief Executive provided an update to the Board. He noted that there are two live planning events in relation to the Freeport currently underway, both of which EMF intends to respond to. In relation to the SEGRO application, EMF will submit its response by 9 January 2026 and will register its interest as an Interested Party (while responding to the MAG/ Prologis planning application concurrently). Consultation is ongoing with Uniper regarding proposed amendments to the Local Development Order (LDO). EMF is engaging with Uniper colleagues and intends to respond formally. He confirmed that draft representations will be shared with interested and affected members for input.</p> <p>A meeting is scheduled in December with National Highways, EMCCA and LCC to discuss Junction 24.</p> <p>It was also noted that EMF has now received full approval from MHCLG for its revised seed capital projects, as agreed by the Public Sector Directors Group in October. The accompanying letter from MHCLG provides flexibility to carry spend into the next financial year. EMF is awaiting drawdown of the remaining funds, expected by the end of January 2026.</p> <p>The Board received a brief update on communications priorities. The update also covered that a note on the Budget has been circulated for information.</p> <p>He noted that he had attended a useful briefing session with The Economist, following earlier engagement with The Times. A further briefing with The Guardian is scheduled to lay the groundwork for positive coverage of EMF's activities.</p>

6. Final Accounts

At the request of the Chair, the item on the Final Accounts was moved forward on the agenda.

The Accountable Body's Director of Finance provided an update to the Board. In relation to EMF's Final Accounts, she noted that draft accounts were received in October and reviewed in detail by the Accountable Body. These accounts have since been subject to external audit, with no changes required and no issues flagged. The post-audit final accounts are identical to the draft accounts presented in October.

Following the report, the Board **AGREED** that EMF's audited statement of accounts is approved and **DELEGATED** authority to the Chair to sign the accounts on behalf of EMF.

It was noted that this information would then be uploaded to Companies House.

7. Accountable Body Transition Discussion

At the request of the Chair, the discussion on Accountable Body (AB) transition was moved forward on the agenda, to allow sufficient time for discussion.

The Chair noted that EMCCA's Strategy Day note on AB transition had been recirculated with the agenda and confirmed that EMCCA's Executive Director of Place would kick off the discussion and then leave the meeting to allow Board members to discuss the options openly.

EMCCA's Executive Director of Place provided an update to the Board.

In relation to the mechanics of AB transition he outlined the logistics and decision-making arrangements under development, noting that EMCCA have a dedicated project manager coordinating this work. Due diligence is underway on contracts and novation, and EMCCA Board decision-making will be choreographed to align with EMF Board decisions to ensure consistency of timing and messaging.

He noted the critical path to AB transfer relates to legal and finance support and expressed confidence these can be completed before April 2026. HR and IT services are not considered to be on the critical path and can be reviewed in slower time by the Freeport as corporate procurement decisions.

The AB's Assistant Chief Executive commented that from an LCC perspective the initial AB transfer discussions will be largely a legal/administrative process. Most contracts requiring novation have been identified; next steps are for all three parties to instruct solicitors. LCC has spoken to its legal team and expects to be ready immediately after the Christmas break, making the April deadline achievable. Legacy support services for the Freeport can continue for the time being and there is no immediate urgency to change these. He noted that prior conversations have taken place regarding ensuring the North West Leicestershire area continues to see direct benefit from Freeport retained business rates given current delivery there.

	<p>The MHCLG representative welcomed the progress made and noted that things are moving in the right direction.</p> <p>Following discussion, the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AGREED to progress the AB transition for April, with the critical path focused on legal and finance; HR/IT services etc to be addressed post-transfer. • AGREED that a further paper would be presented to the February Board
8.	<p><u>Skills and Communities Fund Update</u></p> <p>EMF's Head of Green Growth and Inclusion provided a brief update on the Skills and Community Equity Fund. This had been included in the Investment Strategy agreed by the Board in April, and further details had been provided in the Skills Delivery Plan approved earlier in the year.</p> <p>The Fund aims to support work readiness and address skills gaps in target sectors. Since July, EMF has developed a pilot fund, invited bids and undertaken an assessment process. She thanked directors Frank Robotham and Cllr Walker-Gurley for their involvement in the assessment process and noted that an independent skills expert had also assessed the projects. The EDT have also been working closely with EMCCA to ensure alignment with their relevant projects</p> <p>The Head of Green Growth and Inclusion provided an overview on the three projects which have been approved for funding. She confirmed that there are lots of opportunities for members to get involved with these projects.</p> <p>She noted that the next steps include finalising funding agreements and commencing delivery early next year. EMF's Skills Lead will lead on implementation and feedback will be provided to the two unsuccessful projects:</p> <p>The Head of Green Growth and Inclusion confirmed that EMF is determining the next stage of delivery and considering allocation of funding for next year, including targeting specific groups and sectors.</p> <p>The Board had the opportunity to discuss the update. It was noted that the overall process for assessment was straightforward and positive and the quality of information provided was praised, noting initial markings were accurate and the exercise was credible. It was suggested a panel meeting would have been helpful to ensure contributions were fully considered.</p> <p>Further points were raised on the importance of targeting children eligible for free school meals, noting discretion at grassroots level for teachers to determine eligibility. The Chair asked that this be incorporated into the process.</p> <p>The need for transparency and strategic thinking in future investment decisions was stressed, noting that while the pilot approach was pragmatic, an open process should be adopted for future rounds. The Head of Green Growth and Inclusion provided reassurance to the Board that an open call is planned for the next stage of funding, and the pilot was intended to test the process.</p>

	<p>Following discussion, the Board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NOTED progress made on establishing the Fund and delivering the pilot phase. • AGREED to consider how Members can support project delivery and engagement in future rounds. • NOTED that a wider call for submissions will be undertaken for the next stage of funding.
9.	<p><u>EMF Office Location Update</u></p> <p>The Head of Operations and Programmes presented an update on the relocation of EMF's office. He noted that the team has been based at LCC on a temporary basis, and with the team growing and LCC stepping back as Accountable Body, this is an appropriate time to review office arrangements.</p> <p>He noted that the next steps included finalising commercial terms and consulting staff on the move and implications. The aim is to complete fit-out and occupy the space by April 2026.</p> <p>The Board had the opportunity to discuss the report. Points were raised on the need to push back on unit price, as well as some further public sector options for the EDT to consider, however the proposal was broadly supported, noting the difficulty of finding high-quality, sustainable office space in this part of the country and the benefits of a location independent of any single Member organisation.</p> <p>Cllr Merrie noted he had to leave the call at this point but thanked the Board and noted that he would still be around as an alternate when Cllr Saffell takes on the role of NWLDC's Director.</p> <p>Further questions were raised on lease flexibility and what options had been considered from members and the Head of Operations and Programmes confirmed that other options had been explored but were unavailable or did not meet specific requirements. He AGREED to explore the further options that had been presented during the meeting, assessing in line with the criteria set out in the Board paper.</p> <p>Following discussion, the Board:</p> <p>APPROVED the preferred location, subject to securing best commercial terms and NOTED that other options presented at this meeting will be explored before final decision.</p> <p>APPROVED the ceiling costs and commitment – in ultimately signing a lease – across multiple financial years.</p> <p>AGREED to delegate final approval to the Chair and Accountable Body.</p>
10.	<p><u>Board and Subcommittee Forward Look</u></p> <p>The Board NOTED the Forward Look.</p>
11.	<p><u>Action Log.</u></p>

	<p>The Board NOTED that actions from its previous meeting(s) had been completed, overtaken or were on the agenda and NOTED the list of outstanding and completed actions since the last meeting.</p> <p>In relation to Action 16, Cllr Reaney updated the Board that Derbyshire County Council at its last Cabinet meeting had approved upgrades to the A50 as noted at the Board meeting in November.</p>
12.	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>The Chair formally recorded the Board's thanks to Cllr Keith Merrie as he steps down in his role of Director for NWLDC.</p> <p>The Chair noted that a meeting of the Remuneration and People Subcommittee is taking place after the Board and that the next Board meeting would be on 22 January 2026 at Rushcliffe Arena. She wished everyone a Happy Christmas.</p> <p>The meeting ended at 3pm.</p>

1.30-3pm, 18 December 2025

Chair: Nora Senior