



Leader's network meeting is open to any chief officer or Chair of a Community/Voluntary sector organisation. The idea is to meet a few times a year for peer support, to discuss relevant issues and initiatives and to have a platform for a learning agenda encompassing speakers from local organisations or projects.

- The speaker at the July meeting was Paul Johnson Chair of the Wiltshire & Swindon LEP (Local Economic Partnership) <http://www.swlep.biz/>
- The LEPs (of which there are 39 across England) are in effect a replacement of the RDAs (Regional Development Agencies) however they have a quite different remit from their predecessors
- LEPs have a business/economic focus with less of an angle on third sector than the RDAs.
- As there are 39 areas they obviously have a much smaller geographic area than the RDA. This is beneficial to Wiltshire & Swindon as previously, being combined with both Cornwall and Bristol tended to distort statistics about the region.
- The LEP covers the area of both Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council.
- There are 13 members including representatives of both Wiltshire & Swindon councils, business sector, military and education and have recently employed executive Isobel Brown.
- The LEPs receive funding from central government and from 2014 there will be additional European funding.
- Funding totals £2billion over 5 years from next year.
- In 2014-2015, 50% of this funding will be devolved directly to the LEPs and then the other 50% is in a pot to be competed for.
- From 2015-2016 onwards 100% of the funding will be competed for.
- Wiltshire Council is the accountable body for the funding.
- The money can be bid for by the LEP but must be used for projects that cover the geographical area of the LEP – Infrastructure projects are key.
- LEP projects can be capital or revenue but focus is on business, housing and transport.
- There is also the opportunity for LEPs to receive additional funding where working together across a wider area that would result in savings from collaboration.
- The LEP submitted early thoughts on work to central government in May that builds on their business plan from 2012
<http://www.swlep.biz/resources/document634891940048410000.pdf> - a new business plan is currently being worked up.

Main issues:

- A major focus for the LEP is transport - to improve infrastructure, efficiency for businesses, appeal to incoming businesses, appeal for employees (contrast between live & work appeal).
- LEP need hard evidence on regional and community transport issues to use as backing for bids, so could be scope for caps to input local knowledge.
- Main priorities are:
 - A303 dualing
 - North-South connectivity
 - Newbury-Exeter rail electrification



- Electrification would put Swindon and Westbury within an hour of London, national stats show business productivity reduces from radius over an hour outside the capital
- Other issues for Wiltshire are lack of higher education in the county, currently only tech colleges in Swindon and Salisbury and small campuses of Bath Spa Uni in Corsham (plans to increase) but no other HE provision currently – means 18+ leave county and Wiltshire does not see an influx of students from other areas which most counties would see. Evidence that large percentage of graduates stay in town/city they studied in so Wiltshire misses out.
- Major services such as hospitals also outside county.
- Wiltshire has unique dynamic with large military population.
- Wiltshire has a large German-speaking population due to military presence.
- Wiltshire are one of 20 bids being considered for City Deals money, conclusion is expected in October.
- Tech skills colleges (linked to military) being planned for Lyneham and Porton Down
- Economy needs to support an aging population.
- Need to combat youth unemployment.
- Rural isolation and access to services also major issues.
- LEP feel SMEs and Social Enterprises are hugely important to the county – 24,000 SMEs in Wiltshire & 6,000 in Swindon however focus needs to be put onto large business and infrastructure projects to leverage in the central government funding.
- There will be some funding available for SMEs with 2-30 employees for apprenticeships (includes social enterprise)