

Wiltshire Council

JSEC

1 April 2015

Public Participation

Questions from Cllr Caswill

Question 1

It is noted that the JSEC Terms of Reference begin with the aim of (providing) “local democratic and financial accountability for the Swindon and Wiltshire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), the use of the Local Growth Fund (LGF) and other related funding streams” but that later on there are several references to the JSEC functions being concerned with the ‘*delivery*’ (my italics) of agreed actions. How will local democratic and financial accountability be provided for the agreed actions, and content of the SEP and the LGF?

Response

The SWLEP Joint Strategic Economic Committee full voting membership consists of the political leaders of each of the SWLEP Unitary Authorities, each of their deputy leaders and the cabinet member holding the portfolio for economic development. The purpose of JSEC is to provide local democratic and financial accountability for the Swindon and Wiltshire Strategic Economic Plan, the use of the Local Growth Fund, and other related funding streams. A key role of the Joint Strategic Economic Committee will be to formally agree and sign-off key decisions and actions of the SWLEP Board (including the SEP and proposals to government on the use of Local Growth Funds) in an open, transparent and publically accessible environment, subject to the statutory provisions on access to information in relation to confidential or exempt items of business.

SWLEP Board meetings will be open to the public from 2015/16 onwards, and there are joint scrutiny arrangements in place.

Financial accountability is also provided by the Accountable Body (Wiltshire Council). The Accountable Body is responsible for Ensuring (through the Section 151 officer) that funds are used appropriately using the same checks that Wiltshire Council would of its own funds and in line with any grant conditions in the grant condition letter through a Section 31 Grant Determination.

Question 2

How is public accountability ensured for the SWLEP Public Transport Body?

Response

The Local Transport Body is undergoing reform as part of the SWLEP Assurance Framework required by Government. The existing LTB will become part of the SWLEP governance structure in 2015 as a formal SWLEP Sub-Group. Its role within this structure will be as an advisory role to the SWLEP Board and it will no longer approve funding for transport major schemes. Public Accountability will be maintained through the necessary legal agreements between the SWLEP and Wiltshire Council as Accountable Body and the governance structures and agreements included in the SWLEP Assurance Framework.

Question 3

Can (and will) the JSEC encourage the SWLEP to give a higher profile to the Public Transport Body on its web pages?

Response

As part of a process which is underway to strengthen the transparency of SWLEP decision making and activity a number of documents will be made available through the SWLEP website in 2015, as per the SWLEP Assurance Framework. This will include information pertaining to all SWLEP subgroups, including the Local Transport Sub-Group which will replace the Local Transport Body in 2015.

Question 4

How are the public to be involved in the production and refreshment of the SWLEP priorities, in such a way as to avoid in future local elected members finding out about large and significant developments in their areas in the press?

Response

In line with the SWLEP Assurance Framework, the SWLEP Board will conduct its business in an open and transparent manner, comparable to the two Unitary Authorities, which will enable interested stakeholders and members of the public to scrutinise and participate in the SWLEP processes. The SWLEP has a dedicated website which includes information and documents relating to the SWLEP's activities and how the public and business community can engage in SWLEP processes. Stakeholders who are not SWLEP members are able to attend SWLEP Board meetings to make a representation on a scheme(s) or agenda item(s) when appropriate. If stakeholders wish to make representation at SWLEP Board meetings, applications should be made via the SWLEP Secretariat a minimum of ten working days in advance of the meeting date.

Question 5

It has been said that the SEP will be 'refreshed' in the summer. Who will prepare and who will decide on a revised SEP?

Response

The SWLEP Board is responsible for the development, review and refreshing of the Strategic Economic Plan. The SWLEP Joint Strategic Economic Committee will provide local democratic and financial accountability for the Swindon and Wiltshire Strategic Economic Plan, in line with the SWLEP Assurance Framework.

Question 6

One potential candidate for Growth Funding in Wiltshire in the future is a Chippenham southern link road. Does Wiltshire Council continue to own 196 hectares of land across which such a road would be built? If so, is the Council willing to make that land available for that road infrastructure?

Response

There are no extant plans or plans in development which include a Chippenham Southern Link Road. Therefore there is no route or corridor identified for such a project and no ability to bid to the Local Growth Fund where no proposal exists.

Question 7

In the SWLEP Governance paper provided to Wiltshire Council at its meeting on 24 February, there is on page 10 a diagram of the SWLEP structure. It shows the Head of Economy and Skills at Swindon Borough Council and the Director of Economic Planning and Development at Wiltshire Council as members of the SWLEP secretariat. Are these officers seconded to the SWLEP secretariat for part of their time? Who is responsible for the work they do there?

Response

The SWLEP is a partnership between the two local authorities and the local business community. The work of the SWLEP aligns with the business plans of both councils business plan and so therefore officers from the councils, particularly the Director of Economic Planning and Development in Wiltshire and the Head of Economy and Skills in Swindon Borough Council director of EDP work to deliver this partnership's agenda, given the benefits accruing to both local authority areas pertaining to the work of the SWLEP. There is no formal secondment in place and officers report to both their line managers in accordance with each Council's performance management arrangements and through relevant SWLEP groups as defined in the SWLEP Assurance Framework and governance structures.