

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

6 June 2017

Legacy Report of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) Joint Task Group

Purpose of the report

1. To present the work to date and recommendations for the future scrutiny of the SWLEP and the task group's legacy topics for endorsement by this committee.

Background

2. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are partnerships that bring local authorities, civic leaders and businesses together to set an economic strategy and support the economic development and growth of their areas. They play a critical role in identifying local economic priorities and opportunities to drive economic growth and the creation of local jobs. A clear vision and strong strategic leadership is therefore a key requirement for the LEP.
3. LEPs are governed to ensure that they pursue economic development opportunities which add value and do not duplicate the existing work of their local authority partners, or other organisations. They should also offer central government value for money, additionality, and prompt local economic growth.
4. The main capital resource currently at the LEPs' disposal is the proportional allocation of the Growing Places Fund, created by the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Department for Transport. This is to be used to deliver local infrastructure to support and drive economic growth. LEPs can also bid for an allocation of the Regional Growth Fund, which is a national challenge fund with bids in competition with each other.
5. The Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) is a voluntary partnership recognised by central government. It is not currently incorporated and therefore is not bound by the model for governance that is legally required for corporations. Governance arrangements are therefore at the discretion of the Partnership, and should be designed to meet its vision, priorities and activities. The SWLEP has established its vision and strategic objectives in its Business Plan.
6. The SWLEP has adopted an Assurance Framework which includes provision for joint scrutiny arrangements between Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council. The SWLEP Assurance Framework sets out the arrangements for governance and the working arrangements for delegated funding from Central

Government budgets and programmes in accordance with the Central Government's LEP Assurance Framework.

7. The joint scrutiny exercise was established between Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council (SWLEP Joint Task Group). The objectives of the joint exercise were for the task group to act as a "critical friend" and develop an overview of strategies and plans, and to provide independent scrutiny of the work of the LEP Board and Joint Strategic Economic Committee (JSEC).

Terms of reference

8. The following terms of reference for the task group were agreed and adopted by the task group at their 28th October 2014 meeting:

The Joint Task Group will:

1. Develop an overview and scrutiny framework and operational protocols which meet the requirements of democratic accountability for the use of public funds by a partnership body which is led by the business community under a mandate from the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy.
2. Whilst developing the framework, the Task Group will carry out trial activities to scrutinise the outcomes and work of the SWLEP. In fulfilling this role the task group will: -
 - a) Perform all overview and scrutiny functions on behalf of both Councils in respect of the SWLEP and JSEC
 - b) Appoint such sub-groups as it considers appropriate to fulfil those functions.
 - c) Review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge or any of the SWLEP and JSEC functions.
 - d) Make reports and recommendations to the Councils relevant partner in connection with the discharge of any functions.
 - e) Approve a forward work programme, including the programme of any sub-groups it appoints so as to ensure that the Task Group and sub-groups' time is effectively and efficiently utilised.
 - f) Foster and encourage an inclusive, structured, non-partisan and non-adversarial approach to overview and scrutiny which is reliant on evidence rather than anecdote.

Membership

9. The task group comprised the following membership (as of 20 October 2016):

Wiltshire Councillors:

Cllr Alan Hill (Chairman)
Cllr Christine Crisp
Cllr Mark Packard

Swindon Councillors:
Cllr Cathy Martyn
Cllr Steve Weisinger
Cllr Des Moffatt
Cllr Chris Watts

Work of the SWLEP Joint Task Group

10. The task group have met on twelve occasions between September 2014 and April 2017, initially with the focus of developing the members' understanding of the LEP and its operation.
11. The initial work programme was agreed at the task group meeting on 28 October 2014 and included the following topics:
 - The overall decision-making process of the SWLEP Board and how the prioritisation and allocation of resources is decided.
 - How the outcomes of the SWLEP align with Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council, and any lessons learnt that can or have been learnt from previous submissions.
 - For task group members to attend SWLEP Board meetings when possible to broaden understanding of the SWLEP.
12. A deep-dive review of the composition of SWLEP Board membership, recruitment, and succession planning was performed by the task group. Comparisons in membership and succession were made with Gloucestershire; Northamptonshire; Oxfordshire; and Worcestershire LEPs.
13. The task group considered and provided recommendations on the core assessment criteria used to discover and prioritise schemes. They also considered a project pipeline which documented the various stages a project goes through before it is delivered, and the criteria used for assessing strategic economic plans.
14. Other topics and agenda items covered by the task group included:
 - The procedures and operation of the SWLEP.
 - Regular updates on the Local Growth Fund deal including an analysis of its allocation.
 - Updates on the SWLEP Local Growth Fund performance.
 - The Assurance and Governance Frameworks of the SWLEP.
15. It was noted by officers that the SWLEP is currently the only LEP in the country which has a scrutiny function in place in the form of a localised LEP Joint Task Group.

Future of the SWLEP Joint Task Group

16. The following options were considered by the task group when recommending the future of the scrutiny of the SWLEP:
 - a. Option 1: to retain the SWLEP Joint Task Group with the current terms of reference; membership; and frequency of meetings. The reports mentioned in Option 2 would then be presented to the task group rather than the parent committees.
 - b. Option 2: that the Swindon and Wiltshire parent committees receive “joint” reports with a view to setting a joint task group or joint rapid scrutiny as and when needed.
17. Option 2 was considered with the possibility of receiving quarterly reports throughout its first year, then moving to annual or biannual reports. There would be a caveat that either parent committee can request the formation of a task group or rapid scrutiny to consider an issue in-depth, which would be agreed by the respective chairs.
18. Quarterly reports would include updates from board meetings; progress updates on ongoing projects; and updates on bids and funding. Annual reports would provide an overview of the year from the quarterly reports; recruitment, retention, and succession planning update; the “life of a project” for completed projects and future project prioritising; assurance framework monitoring and evaluation; and the local economic assessment.
19. Following conversation with officers and the new chairman of the SWLEP regarding their views on the future of SWLEP scrutiny it was noted that they supported the continuation of SWLEP joint task group’s work in its current form.
20. The consensus of the task group was that the work of the SWLEP task group on the LEP and the JSEC should continue in its current form in accordance with the terms of reference. It was agreed that the final decision on the format of this should be decided by the new Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (and its equivalent under Swindon Borough Council), enabling the new council to decide for themselves the best way forward.
21. Key topic areas noted by officers and members for possible future SWLEP scrutiny work included:
 - The growing places infrastructure fund. It was noted that the promotion of private sector businesses bidding for the fund was a priority.
 - Ensuring that businesses understand the SWLEP and what it can provide.
 - “The Life of a Project” – following a project from start to finish through the LEP process. This was noted as still difficult as only 1 project had been completed and there was likely to only be one more by the end of 2017.
 - Benchmarking the way in which the South West LEP prioritises bidding, as compared to LEPs in other areas.
 - To perform a piece of scrutiny work on the JSEC.

22. Any new members of the SWLEP Joint Task Group would need to be re-familiarised with the members and new members of the SWLEP, including the new chairman, John Mortimer, and vice-chairman, Adam Schalamach.

Proposal

23. That the report of the Task Group is endorsed and Option 1 is agreed as the method of continuing the scrutiny of the SWLEP.

Recommendations

That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee:

1. **Note the work to date of the SWLEP Joint Task Group as detailed in this report.**
2. **Agree Option 1 as the route to continue scrutiny of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) in the form of the SWLEP Joint Task Group.**
3. **Recommend that the new membership of the SWLEP Joint Task Group agree their future work programme, taking into consideration the suggested key topic areas noted in paragraph 21 of this report.**

Cllr Alan Hill, Wiltshire Council, Chairman of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) Joint Task Group

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Appendices

None

Background documents

None