

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

21 January 2025

Subject: Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy 2025-2036

Cabinet Member: Cllr Richard Clewer - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Military-Civilian Integration, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Development, Arts, Heritage, and Tourism

Key Decision: Non-Key

Executive Summary

This paper presents the Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy 2025-2036 to Wiltshire Council's Cabinet for approval. The strategy is also being presented to Swindon Borough Council's Cabinet for approval on 4 February 2025.

The government requires the production of an economic strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire as part of its policy to transfer the functions of local enterprise partnerships (LEP) to upper tier local authorities. The completion of the strategy was also a core funding condition for 2024/25. The purpose of the strategy is to present the strategic priorities required to deliver economic growth for the next ten years. It also sets the wider context for any future requirement to produce a 'local growth plan' that is, capital investment priorities requiring government funding for delivery or enabling works.

The functions of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) transferred on 1 April 2024 and the SWLEP team transferred to Wiltshire Council on 1 June 2024, operating as the Swindon and Wiltshire Business and Growth Unit within Economy and Regeneration. There are joint governance arrangements across Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council to oversee the operation and management of the Business and Growth Unit including the establishment of a business growth board, known locally as the Economic Advisory Board (EAB). Its role is to act as the business voice for the area and comment on strategic economic plans. The EAB has been consulted along with officers and SWBGU business engagement groups.

The version of the strategy presented to Cabinet in appendix 1 is a pre-design version of the strategy.

Proposals

That Cabinet approve and agree:

- 1) The Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy 2025-2036; and
- 2) To delegate to the Corporate Director, Place, to sign off the designed copy of the strategy for publication.

Reason for Proposals

The production of an economic strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire is a government requirement.

Parvis Khansari
Corporate Director, Place

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. This paper presents the Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy 2025-2036 to Wiltshire Council's cabinet for approval. The strategy is also being presented to Swindon Borough Council's cabinet for approval on 4 February 2025.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The strategy aligns to the Council's priorities and objectives in its Business Plan because it seeks to deliver a thriving economy; supports the skills development and economic inclusion of people; and helps to build a sustainable environment.

Background

3. This paper presents the Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Strategy 2025-2036 to Wiltshire Council's cabinet for approval. The strategy is also being presented to Swindon Borough Council's cabinet for approval on 4 February 2025.
4. The government requires the production of an economic strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire as part of its policy to transfer the functions of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP) to upper tier local authorities. The completion of the strategy was also a core funding condition for 2024/25. The purpose of the strategy is to present the strategic priorities required to deliver economic growth for the next ten years. It also sets the wider context for any future requirement to produce a 'local growth plan' that is, capital investment priorities requiring government funding for delivery or enabling works.
5. The functions of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) transferred on 1 April 2024 and the SWLEP team transferred to Wiltshire Council on 1 June 2024, operating as the Swindon and Wiltshire Business and Growth Unit within Economy and Regeneration. There are joint governance arrangements across Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council to oversee the operation and management of the Business and Growth Unit including the establishment of a business growth board, known locally as the Economic Advisory Board (EAB). Its role is to act as the business voice for the area and comment on strategic economic plans. The EAB has been consulted along with officers and SWBGU business engagement groups.

6. The version of the strategy presented to Cabinet in appendix 1 is a pre-design version.

Main Considerations for the Council

7. The strategy has been developed by the Swindon and Wiltshire Business and Growth Unit in collaboration with officers at both Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council. Two closed consultation exercises were undertaken during its development, seeking the views of:
 - a. officers across a range of service areas;
 - b. two external business engagement groups: the Business Intelligence and Network Group and the Rural Economy Sector Group;
 - c. the Economic Advisory Board; and
 - d. The Leaders of both Council's through the joint governance arrangements for the Business and Growth Unit.
8. The consultations were undertaken to firstly: test the vision statement and strategic priorities to be included in the strategy; and secondly, to seek comments on the draft strategy document.

Safeguarding Implications

9. The economic strategy is designed as an overarching framework setting out the area's economic growth priorities to assist with securing new or additional public and private sector investment. It does not include specific programmes for delivery, the detailed delivery plan will be a separate exercise following approval of the strategy. If new funding is secured, delivery will be designed to meet any safeguarding requirements by the relevant service area as needed.

Public Health Implications

10. The strategy seeks to improve skills development, the creation of good quality jobs and encourage greater economic inclusion. In such a way, its delivery will support better health and wellbeing outcomes, support the creation of new jobs and improve the skills base of residents and workers.

Procurement Implications

11. There are no procurement implications from the approval of the economic strategy. The strategy can be used as part of the evidence base to bid for funding but does not have any specific funding attached to it at this stage.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

12. The strategy provides a framework for the delivery of a a wide range of activity if funding is secured. The scope of the strategy is aimed to increase economic inclusion and social mobility across a broad range of groups and communities for example: those out of work or on low incomes or furthest from the workforce; raising educational aspirations where appropriate; supporting former armed service personnel and leavers into work; and enabling the sustainable economic growth of rural communities through better digital connectivity. Delivery of the strategy will also encourage employers to consider adopting more inclusive and flexible employment practices for example to people with special education needs and disabilities or with health issues to a support

their inclusion and social mobility. Delivery will extend across two local authorities and multiple service areas. The equalities impact of the delivery of the strategy therefore will be broad and outputs and impacts will be monitored according to respective local authority and service areas' equalities and funding requirements.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

13. Sustainable economic growth is a cross-cutting theme within the strategy. Examples include activities which will assist with reducing carbon emissions, support green construction techniques, encourage green skills development, support resource efficiency, and secure flood mitigation scheme investment.
14. The approval of the economic strategy will not directly result in energy consumption. The delivery of future projects will be subject to their own review and decision making.
15. The approval of the economic strategy will not directly result in carbon emissions. The delivery of future projects will be subject to their own review and decision making.
16. The approval of the economic strategy will not directly result in any environmental management risks. The delivery of future projects will be subject to their own review and decision making.
17. The strategy does not last longer than 20 years however projects implemented as a result of the strategy could be long term, and resilience to the impacts of climate change should be taken into consideration in project design.

Workforce Implications

18. The approval of the economic strategy will not have any direct staffing implications. The delivery of future projects will be subject to their own review and decision making.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

19. Risk 1: The development and approval of the economic strategy is a government requirement. Failure to do so would mean that the core funding condition the Council agreed to when taking on the accountable body, and managing body role for LEP functions, would not have been met.
20. Risk 2: Swindon and Wiltshire's economic growth priorities will not be fully considered within the government's emerging policy framework and forthcoming comprehensive spending review, and the area may miss out government and private sector investment as a result.
21. Risk 3: reputational damage for Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council for failing to deliver a LEP core function following the transition of responsibilities to upper tier authorities.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

22. The economic strategy covers the existing functional market area of Swindon and Wiltshire with a review or refresh in three-years. The devolution agenda means that

the geographic coverage may change in the future and the review or refresh may need to be undertaken in two years.

Financial Implications

There are no immediate financial implications from the approval of the strategy. The document sets out where government funding is needed to deliver the strategy effectively and where private investment will need to be sought. If any investment is secured it will go through the appropriate approval routes.

Legal Implications

23. No legal implications have been identified.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

24. The work of the Swindon and Wiltshire Business and Growth Unit operates under a shared governance structure with Swindon Borough Council and under a Service Level Agreement between the two councils. The draft strategy has been presented to the Joint Oversight Partnership which operates as the scrutiny function for the work of the Swindon and Wiltshire Business and Growth Unit.

25. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Environment Select Committee will be briefed on the report on 16 January 2025.

Options Considered

26. The production of the strategy is a government requirement.

Conclusions

27. The strategy has been socialised and consulted on within both Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire Council, as well as a closed group of businesses and business representative organisations. It has been updated based on their feedback, and it is proposed for approval.

Parvis Khansari - Corporate Director, Place

Report Author: Debby Skellern, debby.skellern@wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix 1 -Draft Economic Strategy for Swindon and Wiltshire 2025-2036
December draft attached as a pre-design version.

Background Papers

None