

**Wiltshire
Strategic Economic
Partnership**

Minutes of the Partnership meeting 26 September 2011

Present:

Paul Johnson	Chairman	Victoria Nye	North Wiltshire Economic Partnership (NWEPP)
Steve Stone	Wiltshire College	Jackie Tuckett	Jobcentre Plus
Mark Barnett	Mid Wiltshire Economic Partnership (MWEPP)	Ken Teal	Federation of Small Businesses
Nicky Alberry	(GWE Business West)	Michael Williams	Wessex Association of Chambers of Commerce (WACC)

Others:

Cllr. Fleur de Rhé-Philippe (Wiltshire Council)
 Alistair Cunningham (Wiltshire Council)
 Steve Richards (S&W LEP Secretariat)
 Peter Beech-Allen (Chairman, WSEP Executive Group)
 Jackie Tuckett (Jobcentre Plus)
 Peter Wheelhouse (Wiltshire Council)
 Ed Bovingdon (Wiltshire Council)

Item 1: Apologies for Absence

Phil Harrison (Jobcentre Plus) – Represented by Jackie Tuckett
 John Matthews (Rural interests)

Item 2: Minutes of the last meeting – 14th July 2011

There were no matters arising from the last meeting. The Chairman signed the minutes as an accurate record.

Item 3: Wiltshire & Swindon Local Enterprise Partnership

i) Newsletter and update

Steve Richards (SR) led this item and confirmed that good progress had been made by the Business Working Group (BWG). With Nicky Alberry and Paul Johnson as joint chairs the aim is to launch the LEP by late January. A monthly newsletter is being produced after BWG meetings to gradually raise the profile of the LEP, whilst keeping existing stakeholders, partners and associates well informed. The BWG aims to maintain the interest and involvement of the business community in addition to using the public sector as the facilitator. The LEP is reliant on partners' networks for publicity but consideration of an independent website is underway.

ii) Chairman's paper

PJ introduced the paper and asserted the intention to ensure the LEP is a relatively lean organisation with 8-10 business representatives and 4 representatives from the public sector. This was considered the best structure to ensure the LEP remains delivery focussed. The existing structures of WSEP and Swindon Strategic Economic Partnership were viewed as fit for use as delivery agents in the interim.

PJ outlined the need to structure the LEP based exclusively on informed knowledge. Specifically, PJ expressed the need to determine which sectors can be classified as 'key' based on the location, sector, size and potential for job creation of businesses in the county. A strong evidence base would better inform the selection of the 'key sectors' for the LEP, as outlined in the briefing paper, in addition to facilitating communication and engagement across the business base in Wiltshire. PJ considered a survey to be an effective means to obtain sufficient information. SR confirmed that the existing research was backward looking and the key would be in determining which sectors have the greatest growth potential over the next 5 years.

MW questioned the neglect of the retail sector in the key sectors outlined in the Chairman's paper. PJ argued that the sector was not a major employer and the multiplier associated with it was relatively small compared to that of manufacturing. KT asserted that like all consumer services the sector follows rather than leads the economic trend so its neglect can be justified to some extent. However, KT disagreed with how small businesses were overlooked given their potential to deliver immediate results through start-up and job creation, particularly in Wiltshire where such a large proportion of small and micro businesses exist. PJ reminded the Board that the aim was to identify sectors rather than business sizes to target.

SS and PBA raised the 'leak' of investment and income to other counties as a factor to consider, on the grounds that particular sectors might be more prone to 'leak' the benefits of their growth outside of the county. Selecting sectors which have a supply chain largely contained within Wiltshire might also enhance the potential to economically benefit the county.

PW raised the survey of employment land and workspace completed on behalf of Wiltshire Council by Roger Tym and Partners. The survey, focussed around determining future growth sectors and the corresponding employment and land space requirements, was considered to be a potentially salient source of information for the LEP strategy. PJ expressed concern that the survey was too focussed on land availability and did not address the key questions, which needed to be answered and that the questionnaire was too lengthy to expect reasonable response rate. AC suggested that in combination with other sources of data Wiltshire Council has access to, for instance from Cambridge Econometrics, the Local Economic Assessments and Action for Wiltshire, the appropriate analysis could be made.

SR assured the Board that such data did exist and could be sourced from the ONS or VAT data. However, SR commented that even if the survey did successfully reach all 23,400 businesses in Wiltshire, at the very most a 10% response rate could be expected. This would necessitate a considerable degree of interpolation to generate a complete overview of business in Wiltshire. MW highlighted the 9% response rate from the 1,400 WACC members on the employment and land survey and KT envisaged a similar response rate could be expected from the 2,700 FSB members in Wiltshire.

The decision was made to first assess the business data available and to follow up with a business survey. Details required were:

Database analysis

- Buy, create or merge existing data of the vast majority of the 23,400 businesses in Wiltshire.
- Provide a high level analysis of the SIC codes, post codes, number of employees and sector of businesses in Wiltshire.
- Identify the number of businesses in each sector, the distribution of businesses by size and the geographic location of businesses to inform the priority sectors for the LEP.

Deadline: Next Board meeting – 13 October

Business Survey

- Develop *short* business questionnaire for the 13 October Board meeting.
- Survey to focus on qualitative information such as the barriers to business growth, perceived potential for growth in the medium term and specific sectoral requirements.
- Use database to consult businesses on the business survey.

Action: PW to progress data analysis and business survey

Item 4: Planning – update on peer review

AC explained that a peer review had been undertaken for the development control service, with a number of questions asked about spatial planning. The final report is due to be submitted shortly. However, an early report applauded the clear political vision of the service but criticised the use of four separate IT systems (which are currently being consolidated into one). FRP highlighted the varied performance across the county but envisaged a sharp improvement of the statistics next time they are collected.

PJ questioned the slow turnaround for planning applications in Wiltshire when compared the UK and regional averages. AC asserted that Wiltshire is renowned for its large number of listed buildings and sites of archaeological interest, which skews the statistics significantly.

Planning was considered to be a big issue for the future LEP. At present, pushing through planning applications is considerably easier for larger businesses, whilst small businesses are reliant on the support of the Local Economic Partnerships, specifically from Len Turner. A desire was expressed to remove the pre-application advice fees and to introduce a standard template for businesses for more clarity on the process.

PW raised the research due to be undertaken by Georgina Faribrass into the interaction between the business community and the planning service and the possibility of a planning protocol. External consultants will be used and funded by the Local Economic Partnerships. A PID has been created and the research will begin once the results of the peer review have been received.

Item 5: Items for Information

Papers from the three Local Economic Partnership managers were circulated in advance of the meeting. Any notable comments or questions are outlined below.

Comments were made about the format and structure of the report. The style of the NWEF report with the work undertaken listed under the three main objectives was preferred to a simple list. PBA highlighted the need for a common approach to report writing from all three partnerships.

PJ raised the need for a re-think to the structure of the Local Economic Partnerships to avoid operational overlap. It was also thought to be a good idea to unify the three partnership websites in to a single website. AC stated that the service will be reviewed and tailored to the requirements of the LEP.

Action: JW, MB, VN and PJ to meet to form plans for a new local economic partnership structure.

Item 6: AOB

PJ raised the two informational papers submitted by Adam Nardell and John Matthews respectively.

PBA suggested the inclusion of the Wellington Academy in the list of delivery partners for the LEP.

KT advised that his colleague, Mary Mallia, Development Manager for the FSB would be attending Board meetings. Her position as a Director was highly recommended.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 13th October 2011

Agreed and signed as a correct record:

Signature:

Dated: