

Report of the Chief Executive

LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

1 Purpose of Report

To update members in relation to Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and to recommend that the Council seeks to join the South East Midlands LEP (SEMLEP) area.

2 Executive Summary

The report outlines the background to LEPs and explains how the Borough Council of Wellingborough, whilst not an original member of SEMLEP, should now consider applying for membership.

3 Proposed Action:

It is proposed that members RESOLVE to seek membership of the South East Midlands Local Economic Partnership at an annual cost of £7,000.

4 Background

- 4.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were set up in 2010 after the new coalition government published "Local Growth - Realising Every Places Potential" outlining policy in relation to economic development and growth.
- 4.2 There were 24 LEPs in the first wave, one of which was SEMLEP covering parts of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire and the 4 Unitary Councils of Milton Keynes, Luton, Bedford, and Central Bedfordshire. Northamptonshire LEP (NEP) was established subsequently in May 2011 in a second wave of LEPs. When NEP was established it was a requirement that there was a memorandum of understanding between NEP and SEMLEP. This was in recognition of the significant degree of overlap between the two LEPs and the need for collaborative working.
- 4.3 It is fair to say that in those areas with overlapping LEPs there have been issues in properly defining the differing "functional economic areas" which are key to the work of LEPs in encouraging economic development and attracting inward investment amongst other things.
- 4.4 At the time the LEPs were established 5 out of the 7 Northamptonshire Districts decided to join both SEMLEP and NEP. Wellingborough and East Northants remained outside of SEMLEP and only part of NEP.

- 4.5 In more recent times with the advent of the “Devolution Agenda” it has become apparent that involvement in a larger geographical area may be of benefit. It is unlikely that any devolution deal could ever be based on our County by itself.
- 4.6 There could be benefits in both Wellingborough and East Northants joining the larger LEP area. East Northants Council have recently taken a decision to apply to join SEMLEP. So, in effect, Wellingborough will be the only “NEP only” District in a County that is now entirely subsumed within the wider SEMLEP area.
- 4.7 The timing is right for members to consider Wellingborough applying for membership of SEMLEP and that is now recommended.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 There are no known legal impediments to a District Council area being in 2 LEP areas. Indeed, this is already the case for 5 of the Northamptonshire Districts.
- 5.2 It is understood that Secretary of State approval will be required but colleagues at SEMLEP are confident that a compelling case can be put forward for both of the remaining Northamptonshire Districts to come within the remit of SEMLEP.

6 Financial. Risk and Value For Money Implications

- 6.1 There is an annual fee of £7,000 for District Council members of SEMLEP. The 4 unitary councils pay a higher rate of £10,000.
- 6.2 NEP has secured significant funding for the borough, for example in relation to Stanton Cross and Tresham College. SEMLEP should open up access to other funding opportunities and it is anticipated that the £7,000 will be good value for money.
- 6.3 In the current climate in relation to “devolution deals” size and scale is significant and being part of a larger “club” of local authority areas is the key positive reason for seeking to develop our relationship with SEMLEP. The risk of not making such a move is that we effectively get left behind.
- 6.4 Involvement with NEP will remain positive and the removal of some of the overlapping boundary issues is a step forward. The government may even look to rationalise LEP areas in future and again Wellingborough needs to be properly positioned in order not to miss out on opportunities.

7. Implications for Resources and Equalities

There are no specific resourcing or equalities issues relevant to this particular report.

8. Author and Contact Officer

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9. Consultees

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10. Background Papers

Various papers held by the Chief Executive.

