

Possible Functions of a LEP

In order to fully develop the Central Bedfordshire economy and achieve the area's economic powerhouse potential it is suggested that a LEP may support the functions listed below. Further careful consideration as to the how and at what level these functions are delivered is still to be undertaken, taking into account financial considerations in terms of the best use of resources, track record of delivery and importantly democratic accountability and alignment with existing statutory duties undertaken by the Council.

The Government's view is that LEPs should focus employment and enterprise and transition to the low carbon economy. LEPs are expected to work closely with Universities and Further Education colleges. The LEP functions may include the following:-

- Strategic Economic Planning – Having a Stronger voice nationally by championing the vision for the wider area, and delivering a robust delivery plan, economic intelligence and monitoring activities to measure progress against the vision. This vision would need to reflect the values of the Council and the Sustainable Communities Strategy vision and priorities, in particular creating the conditions for economic success and community prosperity and raising standards and tackling inequalities.
- Business and Enterprise Support - The Council provides services to local businesses of all sizes. Direct contact with our local businesses is an important part of our engagement strategies. Careful consideration of what services are provided at what level is required to ensure effective and focussed support is delivered. Some business services will be delivered nationally (such as UKTI – UK Trade and Industry). LEP may provide the brokerage of influence at that level on behalf of the wider area. It would be important that a LEP took due consideration of the need to continue to support the rural economy, in terms of business development.
- Inward Investment and Business Sector Development - Such activities could include signposting and support for location searches and assistance for business relocation, tourism development including quality improvement (both services and attractions). Again it will be crucial to maximise private sector engagement. This aligns to the need for an element of local sector support, linking with national activities through UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) and importantly building upon the Council's existing relationships with businesses and statutory role as planning and transportation authorities in dealing with business location and growth activities.
- Delivering development, depending on the structure and available funding of the LEP there may be opportunities for direct development (through a procurement approach) activity for infrastructure and other physical development, including regeneration activities. This may be particularly important in accessing the £1 billion Regional growth Fund announced by the Government (though this will be open to public and private bidders). Alternatively, the LEP could undertake funding, bidding, co-ordination and monitoring activities, acting as the conduit between national and local partners and promoting the areas strategic infrastructure needs.

- Strategic Skills development, working alongside existing young persons funding and delivery to maximise adult skills take up and progression. There will be a clear need to ensure that Central Bedfordshire's needs are represented and national funding programs influenced accordingly. This is not currently considered within government suggestions.
- Community economic development, the LEP may take a wider role in third sector development, financial inclusion, and working to tackle inequalities and deprivation in priority areas. This will need to add value to with the Government intent of the Big Society and local approaches to community engagement.

Planning, Transport and infrastructure activities are noted by the Government as possible functions of LEPs. There is no guidance on what this entails, but there would need to be careful consideration to this in terms of statutory roles of Local Authorities, the democratic process and alignment with the Governments drive for localism. A LEP covering multiple local authority boundary areas could be beneficial in delivering strategic infrastructure, such as road rail and utilities, including next generation broadband. The role of LEPs in these matters could have a significant impact on the form a LEP could take.

The arrangements for the passing of RDA activities and contracts will also shape the nature of LEPs. The Government is keen to ensure a smooth transition and there will be considerable negotiation required over regional assets and funding programs/ commitments. RDAs monitoring and evaluation frameworks could be incorporated into LEPs, though this would have to be in line with the principles of minimising bureaucracy and maximising democratic engagement.

Aligned to this could be the role of securing and attracting European Funding. The Council is currently a co-financing body, depending on future arrangements of funding mechanisms, the role of Government Offices and the RDA European funding activities, there may be the potential for the council – as part of existing or wider LEP arrangements, to take a greater role in securing European funding and managing program activities.