
Title:	LEP Review
Purpose:	To introduce the terms of reference and engagement process for the LEP Review and to seek board members input into the wider review process.
Recommendation(s):	That members note the content of this report and support the Chair and Chief Executive in engagement within the Review process.
Impact on Risk Register:	It is important to positively engage with the review process to highlight the strength and achievements of this LEP and to help shape the future direction of LEP activities and geographic alignment.

1 Background

The government set out a commitment at the March 2021 Budget to work with local businesses and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) on the evolution of LEPs. It has subsequently confirmed that the LEP Review will be led by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets) Paul Scully MP.

The government led review into the future role of LEPs will be supported by engagement with businesses, and in particular a programme of conversations with the LEP network. Government will work with LEPs, local businesses and others between now and the Summer to consider the objectives and functions, geography, accountability, Local Authority representation and Interaction and implementation and Funding Models required for evolved LEPs to best support productivity and growth going forward. The BLEP Chair has been invited to sit on the LEP Networks LEP Review steering group and the BLEP CEO is part of the Implementation and Funding steering group.

2 Timetable

The LEP Network is leading the coordination between the LEPs and government and has organised a number of work streams and allocated roles across the LEP membership. The process comprises publication of proposition papers, meetings with officials and outcome reports to both departmental officials and the LEP Network Steering Group the aim is to come to an agreed position on detailed resolution by the Summer Parliamentary recess, to inform advice to Ministers and the Comprehensive Spending Review, on how to evolve LEPs to best support and represent businesses in places.

3 Structure of Review

The review is to be undertaken in two tranches, the first tranche will look to cover the following topic areas:

Objectives: What is the purpose of evolved LEPs and how can they effectively support and represent local businesses? This will include consideration of how institutions could address the long-tail of low productivity, help SMEs to grow and to export and to attract high value inward investment to our regions.

Functions: What functions will the evolved LEPs need to provide to effectively fulfil the objectives? This will include consideration of how we better align business support services with skills, innovation, net zero, trade and export support in places, recent institutional effectiveness and overseas comparators. It will also look at how best to harness LEPs' strategic influence across these themes and what influence they might have over future investment decisions. It will also look at how to make these functions even more business-led and shaped, and what role business should play in advising Local and National Government.

Form: What form do the evolved institutions need to take? This will include consideration of what the future accountability and governance framework will need to contain – perhaps within a national framework – that replaces the existing assurance frameworks. It will also consider how these institutions could work alongside MCAs – currently many LEPs are intertwined in MCAs where they exist. It will consider the balance between central and local ownership and constraints on reform given many LEPs' have company status. The role of the LEP Network in this new model will also be considered to ensure continuity of the relevant key elements of the MoU between the Network and CLGU.

Departmental ownership: LEPs are currently managed by the Cities and Local Growth Unit spanning MHCLG and BEIS. Given the change of emphasis brought about by policy change, consideration will be given to which government department should sponsor and support evolved LEPs.

Geography: At what spatial scale should these institutions operate? This will include consideration of the most effective size and number of institutions, drawing from the existing 38 LEPs and their regional groupings, with potentially more strategic institutions over wider geographies, and without overlaps, taking account of the importance of functional economic areas.

The full terms of reference approved by Ministers for the review are attached as **Appendix 1** to this report.

4 Current Engagement

To support this process the LEP Network have established 4 working groups, all to be led by a LEP Management Board chair.

- Objectives and Functions
- Geographies and Accountabilities
- Representation and Interaction with Local Government
- Implementation and Funding

Our Chairman Andrew Smith has been invited to sit on the overview and steering committee and also to be part of the Geographies and Accountabilities working group. Richard Harrington has been invited to sit on the Implementation and Funding working group.

A series of regional business engagement events are being co-ordinated by the Cities and Local Growth Unit with the session for the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Area taking place on March 13th. This meeting will discuss how current LEP activity has assisted business, the future role business institutions could perform particularly in a post pandemic context, any changes to the LEP model and tailoring of LEP support to local geographies.

5 Key Messages

Ministers have been very clear that this is a natural evolution of LEPs to support the delivery of the Plan for Growth and that the following key principles for LEP's are beginning to emerge through the early consultation process.

Local Enterprise Partnerships should focus on driving prosperity through inclusive growth, capitalising on their unique role as impartial convenors to deliver the Government's Plan for Growth at a local level. Reformed LEPs should retain a strategic role, represent and support local businesses, improve productivity and support the development of their area's comparative economic advantage.

From a Buckinghamshire LEP perspective we will want to highlight the benefit of having a co-terminus geography with a new Unitary Authority and how this supports effective collaborative working between the LEP and Local Authority, we would also want to highlight how regional collaborations could be supported through a federated approach of individual LEPs rather than larger and more remote structure.

Board members are asked to:

- **Note the content of this report and support the Chair and Chief Executive in engagement within the review process.**