

ADEPT and the Local Enterprise Partnerships

The role of ADEPT members is becoming ever more important as the Government puts increasing stress on the importance of place and local industrial strategies in its post referendum approach to economic policy.

Three years ago ADEPT extended its membership to include Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), recognising the extremely close relationships between Chief Executives and Directors of LEPs and 'Place Directors' in local authorities. Given that LEPs and Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) are being asked by the Government to take the lead on local industrial strategies, this means that ADEPT has been placed at the heart of ensuring that Britain continues to have a strong economy once we have left the EU.

It is a strength of the network of 38 LEPs that every one is different. This means that they can tailor themselves to local circumstances. However, what they all have in common is that Government expects them to have a strategic overview of their local economy – usually over an area that covers a number of local authorities – and to provide the link between the business community and the public sector. They also don't have very much money, with core funding from central Government of only £500k per year!

Within Cheshire and Warrington, we have taken the decision that the role of the LEP is to set the strategic direction both for the economy as a whole and for the key drivers of its success, such as transport, skills and business support. Responsibility for the day-to-day delivery of the projects and programmes designed to deliver these strategies sits with partners, usually local authorities or colleges. As a result, the LEP contains the equivalent of only ten full-time, but senior, staff, with a very broad range of experience from Whitehall, the RDAs, and major property and transport consultancies.

Although it is in the North West and part of the Northern Powerhouse, Cheshire and Warrington has the second highest level of GVA per head of any sub-region in England outside of London. Its target is to double the size of its economy by 2040, and the role of the LEP team is to work with partners from across the public and private sectors to identify the policies that need to be pursued if this objective is to be achieved.

This means that over the next six months the team will be agreeing a sub-regional transport strategy; a housing strategy; a strategy to raise skill levels amongst those pursuing vocational qualifications and to get a greater proportion of young people to take STEM qualifications; and a strategy to maintain and improve the sub-region's 'quality of place' – recognising that if Cheshire and Warrington is to attract and retain skilled people, it must be a great place to live, work and relax.

The point now being recognised by the Government is that these strategies need to reflect Cheshire and Warrington's own circumstances rather than, as in the past, being set by Whitehall to meet the needs of the 'average region'.

Alongside the strategy work, the LEP is also responsible for ensuring that it is getting the most out of capital funding it has received from the Government. In Cheshire and Warrington's case this comprises just over £200 million from the Local Growth Fund, which is being spent on a number of major transport projects, a life sciences investment fund and on capital projects in some of our colleges, amongst other things. We also work closely with DCLG to ensure that the £120 million of EU structural funds allocated to Cheshire and Warrington provides as much help as possible to our local economy, and we have a £12 million Growing Places loan fund, which has been invested in a

number of schemes, including in enabling infrastructure for the largest and fastest growing mixed use development site in the North West.

Finally, the LEP also has responsibility for managing and investing in our Cheshire Science Corridor Enterprise Zone, which, in its first year of operation has already led to the creation of 126,000 sq ft of new commercial floorspace, 330 new jobs and 26 new businesses.

The LEP's agenda is a demanding and exciting one, and with only 10 ftes on the team, could not be delivered if it were not for the excellent working relationships we have with the three unitary authorities that make up the sub-region. Those relationships will be even more important if, as seems likely, the Government looks to local areas to take increasing responsibility for their own economies.

Philip Cox
Chief Executive, Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership