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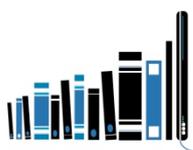
23 Jan 2013

## Pocket Watch – Starter for 10 on LEPs

### Introduction

The Government seems to have alighted on LEPs (Local Enterprise Partnerships) as the essential building blocks for its new locally driven economic and skills system. LEPs are not new, they were listed in the priorities in the May 2010 Coalition Agreement yet it's only recently that a new momentum at national level at least, has built up around them with the Government granting them support funding last September, Lord Heseltine giving them top billing in his industry plan last October and the Chancellor outlining an important planning remit for them in his Autumn Statement last month. With further announcements due this spring, LEPs now appear to carry much of the country's, let alone the Government's, economic hopes on their diverse shoulders. Others have been here before, think perhaps TECs, LSCs and RDAs in recent years but whatever the past, the need for a strong local tier for skills and growth planning has never been greater. For those less familiar with LEPs, here's a starter for ten

1. **What are they?** In a word: "*locally owned partnerships between local authorities and businesses...driving economic growth and the creation of local jobs*"
2. **How many LEPs are there?** There are 39 currently although they vary considerably in size and reach with some spanning local authority boundaries, others linked into enterprise zone areas. Essentially they cover what are known as '*natural economic areas,*' geographically defined by business, housing and travel to work patterns
3. **Where do they come from?** The Coalition Government came in pledging to scrap Regional Development Agencies in favour of more locally determined partnerships. Part of the reason was cost but part also was a desire to simplify and hand over ownership of local economic growth to local players where possible. The concept of LEPs was duly sketched out in the autumn 2010 Local Growth White Paper
4. **What do they do?** The White Paper in 2010 listed 10 possible functions ranging from encouraging business and supporting growth to securing funding and investment. Being locally determined, specific priorities differ by region: the South East LEP, for instance describes itself as an enabling body/dynamic catalyst for change; the North East LEP lists six growth aims including the development of some distinct sectors
5. **How are they organised?** Again this can vary by LEP. Unlike RDAs, LEPs do not have a legal status enshrined in law but operate through a board of Directors with a private sector Chair supported by different functional groups and bodies
6. **How are they funded?** Largely self-financing by tapping into private investment and Government funds such as the Regional Growth Fund or the Growing Places Fund. Some capacity funding was introduced in 2011 which the Chancellor is now enhancing
7. **How are they supported?** Largely through the LEP Network, a gateway for news and developments 'facilitated' through Chambers of Commerce
8. **Why was the Heseltine Report so important?** Because as part of its strategy for growth, it outlined a reformed education and skills system with LEPs leading on identifying priorities and commissioning provision
9. **What did the Chancellor say in his Autumn Statement?** He endorsed the Heseltine model and authorised funding to assist LEPs drawing up local economic and skills plans
10. **What next?** Further developments may follow the Government's response to Heseltine shortly but LEPs are expected to cement their position as key local agencies with skills plans due to be developed this summer and access to a single funding pot from 2015



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