

Membership

Name of Member	Organisation	Attendance
David Andrews (DA)	VisitWiltshire	✓
Anita Bellinger (AB)	InSwindon	
Daniel Rhind-Tutt (DR-T)	Salisbury & District Chamber	✓
Layla Burrows (LB)	Innovate UK	Apologies
Sally Cook (SC)	DWP	Apologies
Kathryn Crosweller (KC)	Chippenham Chamber	
Jim Davison (JD)	MakeUK	✓
Mark Edwards (ME)	Calne Town Council	
Lorna Howarth (LH)	KTN Innovate UK	✓
Emily Manser (EM) / Jenna Hunt (JH)	Cities & Local Growth Unit Representatives	✓✓
Ruth Lambert (RL)	Federation of Small Business, FSB	✓
Awaiting replacement	DIT	
Robin McGowan (RMcG)	Salisbury BID	
Tim Major (TM)	Thames Valley Chamber	✓
Elliott Hutt (EH)	CLA	Apologies
Phil Mills (PM) / David Purcell (DP)	SWMAS	✓
Paul O'Collins (PO)	Innovate UK Edge (previously EEN)	
Mandy Paterson (MP) OR Rob Perks	Inspire by Wessex Chamber	✓
Ben Pidgeon (BP)	Trowbridge Chamber	
Dee Temple-Multon (DT-M) OR Ian Larrard	BusinessWest	✓
Beverley Waters (BW)	ICAEW	Apologies
Ed Humber (EH)	NFU	
SWLEP: attendance will be dependent on topics discussed		

 Swindon & Wiltshire LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP	Minutes of Business Intelligence & Networking Group Meeting (BING) 13 September 2022
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Paddy Bradley (PB)	SWLEP CEO	✓
Rob Creer		✓
Alison North (AN)	SWLEP Director and Chair of BING	Apologies
Amanda Peach (AP) / Laura Arlott (LA)	SWLEP	Apologies ✓
Chris Stevens (CS)	SWLEP	✓
Swindon Borough Council: attendance will be dependent on topics discussed		
	Swindon Borough Council	
Wiltshire Council: attendance will be dependent on topics discussed		
Rory Bowen (RB)	Wiltshire Council	
Rachel Finlay (RFi)		✓
Russell Frith (RF)		✓ - left the meeting at 1.28pm
Victoria Moloney (VM)		✓
David Perrett (DP)		
Mandy Timbrell (MT)		✓

Guest(s)	Paul Moorby (PJM) SWLEP Chair ✓
Chair	Paddy Bradley (PB)
Minutes	Deborah House (DKH)
Venue	Via video / teleconference call
Start time	12.30pm
Finish Time	2pm

1.0	Welcome and Introductions	Date
	The meeting opened at 12.32pm. PB welcomed attendees to the meeting and apologies were noted. He explained that he would be chairing the meeting today as Alison North was travelling and could not attend.	
2.0	Minutes of meeting on 30 June 2022 and matters arising	
	The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2022 were read and approved.	

	Matters Arising: Other Matters Arising were completed or on the agenda.	
3.0	Energy price rises, inflation and other cost of living factors - Impact on businesses	
	<p>PB opened the item with the explanation that government was keen to hear the impact that the energy crisis was having on businesses and offered the item to attendees.</p> <p>Action: SWLEP to draft the discussion into a report to feed through to BEIS. Any specific anonymised case study material would be appreciated.</p> <p>The report has been drafted and issued in the Board papers within the Chief Executive's Report for the meeting held on 29 September. The excerpt used is attached here as an Appendix.</p>	Sept 2022
4.0	Skills update	
4.1	Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) PB advised the meeting that DfE had opened a bidding competition for Employer Representative Bodies, for example, Chambers of Commerce, to lead a partnership to develop and operate Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) in line with LEP geography. Business West had been successful in securing this work for Swindon & Wiltshire, as well as the West of England and Gloucestershire. There would be an interchange of ideas. FSB had been successful in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. Business West would produce a Report by May 2023 identifying priorities to be actioned to address demand and supply issues.	
4.2	Green Skills and Jobs 2022-23 PB advised the meeting of the continuing work on Green Skills and Jobs with sectors of the economy with potential for growth, where high levels of maths, science and technological skills would be needed. Supplying an ongoing pipeline of talent to fulfil these roles was a potential problem and this was what the report was setting out to combat. The primary focus would be the manufacturing, construction, and possibly motor trade sectors. It was uncertain as this stage if these sectors would also be highlighted within the LSIP, but if not, SWLEP's work in these areas would continue.	
4.3	Apprenticeship Strategy 2022-23 LA advised the meeting on the status of SWLEP's Apprenticeship Campaign. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apprenticeships could be the answer for recruitment to vacant roles or to upskill existing staff. 	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The aim of the year-long campaign was to educate and encourage 50 new businesses in Swindon and Wiltshire to take on an apprentice that had not had apprentices before. • The coffee and chat sessions had been very successful. • Some of the businesses now had multi apprentices in their organisations, and some planned to take more in the future. • 12 apprenticeship starts were now in situ within their companies, with one company actively recruiting. • ten companies were in a tentative position and initial conversations had also been held with 16 businesses • a total of 40 businesses were on plan, so we were on track to hit our target. • Some businesses were also upskilling current employees. 	
4.4	<p>Raspberry Pi competition</p> <p>The competition was supported by PA Consulting and open to 8–18-year-olds. The awards were along a specific theme which was usually announced in January. The students were supplied with a Raspberry Pi motherboard, a basic computer, which encouraged students to start coding and computing. Most of the students taking part were from the London area and private schools. SWLEP would like to encourage schools in our area to become involved and was working with strategic partners to compile a pack of resources to support them. The aim was to have a school or college from Swindon and Wiltshire in the national finals by 2025.</p> <p>Should any organisation like to get involved, get in touch with SWLEP.</p>	
5.0	AOB	
	<p>The Public Health Team at Wiltshire Council was currently looking to introduce a workplace health service for all businesses located in the county and would be grateful if attendees could circulate the survey throughout their various networks.</p> <p>The link is as follows:- https://survey.wiltshire.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp?k=165874405900</p> <p>Inspire by Wessex Chamber was running webinars for business leaders which was suitable for businesses with five+ employees Rob Perks Monthly Economic Outlook</p> <p>The UK and Global Economy – forecasting and planning with good intelligence.</p>	
6.0	Items proposed for future meetings	
	<p>UK Shared Prosperity Fund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of the investment plan from Wiltshire Council • Overview of the investment plan from Swindon Borough council • Experience Salisbury • Institute of Technology update • Structure of Tourism support from Government 	



	All presenters were thanked for their contributions to the discussions.	
	Date and time of next meeting	
	Next meeting Wednesday, 7 December 2022 – 12.30pm to 2pm Proposed dates for 2023: Tuesday, 28 February - 12.30pm to 2pm Wednesday, 14 June - 12.30pm to 2pm Thursday, 21 September - 12.30pm to 2pm Wednesday, 6 December - 12.30pm to 2pm	
	Meeting closed at 1.48pm	

Paddy Bradley

7 December 2022

APPENDIX ONE

Energy Costs and Local Economic Growth

1. Introduction

- 1.1. On 13 September 2022, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) convened a meeting of its Business Intelligence Network Group to gather information about the reported impact on businesses of the rise in the cost of energy.
- 1.2. Through the network group, SWLEP brings together employer representative bodies, including Chambers of Commerce, trade associations and the Federation of Small Businesses, local unitary and town councils, tourism organisations, Government Agencies and Departments, Business Improvement Districts, the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Organisation. The aim of the meetings is to gather together a range of voices to share information.

2. Impact of price rises on business

- 2.1. Businesses have been hit by massively increased energy costs, irrespective of business size. An example given was a rise from £12,000 to £80,000. Many manufacturing businesses were high-energy users and had experienced four-fold increases. A manufacturing company in Swindon had seen its energy bill increase from £20,000 to £88,000 per month.
- 2.2. If an SME had fixed its energy prices three years ago, it could now be experiencing a ten-fold increase. Some companies had been asked for payment of one year's energy bill up front to contract with that energy supplier. Energy suppliers were not supplying when contracts were finished, so businesses had no choice but were cornered into using one supplier.
- 2.3. Strategic plans to which businesses were operating had not built in such high operating costs. There were also demands and pressures within the supply chain and the profit margin was shrinking. Businesses that were not struggling previously, could now find themselves in this position. In addition, banks were ready to lend when businesses had money, but not when they did not; if nothing changed businesses would go under. Even prior to the energy cost increase we were seeing a downturn in productivity, primarily due to labour shortages, prior wage increases, increased costs of materials and increased costs in managing supply chain disruption. In some cases, orders were being cancelled as the cost was too high to supply.
- 2.4. There is concern amongst the retail, tourism and hospitality sectors that they are just beginning to pick up after being hit very badly by the effects of the COVID pandemic and now face crippling energy bills with significantly reduced resources to keep businesses open. Competition is very tight for customers. A hotel in the area had seen its energy bill go up with an increase of 10p per item on its laundry bill equating to £1,000 extra per month. In contrast, the price per room was being driven down because of the increase in competition.

3. What is the reaction of businesses?

- 3.1. There is little evidence to show that the full size of these cost increases is being passed on to customers. The businesses understand their customers would not be able to afford large price rises.
- 3.2. From a manufacturing perspective, 60-70% of a trade association's members had to renew their energy contracts in October, so the timing of the Government support was therefore critical. Five Managing Directors had written to say they could not pass this magnitude of increase on to their customers. So, they would probably have to close their doors. They may re-open, but only when energy prices were "normal". Those members which supplied into MoD had been asked to fix their prices. There were good opportunities with MoD, but they could not operate within these constraints. As companies had come to the end of their contracts, they were unable to fix the prices of gas so were having to go to day-to-day pricing. Manufacturing operated under a continuous process, and the worse thing to do was to switch off and start again. It was not possible to move to intermittent operations.
- 3.3. Some businesses are looking at their supply chain. One was subcontracting work out because it would cost the business less; another was looking to import more parts, which would be cheaper than increasing the company's workforce. Some employees wanted to go back to an office because costs at home were rising.
- 3.4. Wiltshire is an area with large amounts of land used for farming and the agricultural sector is highly exposed to the effects of rapidly rising energy costs. There was a lack of winter crops being put into the ground.
- 3.5. A lack of capacity in the electricity grid was issue in the area. Some companies would be looking at de-risking and getting their own onsite energy supply if they were big enough, which was an option not open to all.

4. Help and information available nationally and locally

- 4.1. In a post-meeting note, the major support to businesses was announced by the Government on 21 September. This details the support offered for six months from October 2022 and is in addition to that provided for homeowners.
- 4.2. The Government has set a Supported Wholesale Price – expected to be £211 per MWh for electricity and £75 per MWh for gas, less than half the wholesale prices anticipated this winter – which is a discounted price per unit of gas and electricity.

The level of price reduction for each business will vary depending on their contract type and circumstances:

- 4.2.1. Non-domestic customers on **existing fixed price contracts** will be eligible for support as long as the contract was agreed on or after 1 April 2022. Provided that the wholesale element of the price the customer is paying is above the Government

Supported Price, their per unit energy costs will automatically be reduced by the relevant p/kWh for the duration of the Scheme. Customers entering **new fixed price contracts** after 1 October will receive support on the same basis.

- 4.2.2. Those on **default, deemed or variable tariffs** will receive a per-unit discount on energy costs, up to a maximum of the difference between the Supported Price and the average expected wholesale price over the period of the Scheme. The amount of this Maximum Discount is likely to be around £405/MWh for electricity and £115/MWh for gas, subject to wholesale market developments. Non-domestic customers on default or variable tariffs will therefore pay reduced bills, but these will still change over time and may still be subject to price increases.
- 4.2.3. For businesses on **flexible purchase contracts**, typically some of the largest energy-using businesses, the level of reduction offered will be calculated by suppliers according to the specifics of that company's contract and will also be subject to the Maximum Discount.
- 4.3. The Government will publish a review into the operation of the scheme in three months to inform decisions on future support after March 2023. The review will focus in particular on identifying the most vulnerable non-domestic customers and how the Government will continue assisting them with energy costs.
- 4.4. The Government's response meets many of the concerns of businesses. The review is regarded as crucial. The general view it is better to know any news as early as possible, but this is especially true for bad news, if that is the result of the review.
- 4.5. There is much local guidance and advice available:
 - 4.5.1. The Federation of Small Business (FSB) has recently published an Energy Report based on a survey to its members, which can be accessed via the link below.
<https://www.fsb.org.uk/resources-page/out-in-the-cold.html>
 - 4.5.2. FSB also had a programme of Small Business Night schools available to business owners to help them at the moment, including how to price products in changing times and how to manage their cash flow. Information could be found via the following link:
<https://www.fsb.org.uk/resources-page/give-your-skills-a-boost-with-new-small-business-night-school-training-series.html>
 - 4.5.3. Wiltshire Council's TEN Network and the FSB were collaborating to produce a session for SMEs and micro business on practical advice and support for doing business in a cost-of-living crisis.
 - 4.5.4. Inspire by Wessex Chamber offers a monthly session events for business leaders with five or more employees [Rob Perks Monthly Economic Outlook - The UK and Global Economy – forecasting and planning with good intelligence](#).
 - 4.5.5. Make UK, the trade association for manufacturing businesses has published a report of its intelligence about the impact of energy price rises [Out of control energy bills are now business threatening for 60% of manufacturers – up from 8% just four months ago | Make UK](#)
 - 4.5.6. Salisbury Chamber continues to offer support to its members through its regular networking meeting and focussed discussions.

- 4.5.7. The SWLEP produces a monthly Business Intelligence Report which it circulates to Government departments, local MPs and members of this group. Information can be logged at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SWINDONANDWILTSHIRE>
- 4.5.8. The SWLEP's Growth Hub was producing webinars on how businesses can cut energy costs and other approaches to reducing the cost base.