

Devolution in evolution

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"A mayor is not an essential condition for Devolution", Director General of Decentralisation and Growth, Simon Ridley told members of ADEPT (the Association of Directors of Economy, Environment, Planning and Transport) at the Annual ADEPT conference in Manchester last week (November 6th) in his opening speech.

Despite various suggestions that devolution would only be granted to those who could offer a mayoral system, Simon Ridley commented that this was not a deal breaker but, provided focused leadership and clear accountability were in place, a wide variety of models of devolution were acceptable. Delegates queried the effectiveness of the transfer of powers to local areas before Mr Ridley responded that deals could evolve over time and take in more areas of local decision making, ensuring that 'no deal was ever final'.

Vice President of ADEPT, Neil Gibson questioned if any areas were outside the devolution scope, to be told that at present, schools and some elements of welfare were excluded. Mr Ridley concluded by noting that LEPs and their private sector voice were essential ingredients for any devolution deal for any area, but that would not compromise funding through the Growth Fund and that it was important to get deals 'right' for the local area rather than be constrained by timescales.

ADEPT members, who between them manage nearly £5bn of assets, maintenance and services across England, were encouraged to hear from a series of speakers setting out some of the opportunities that devolution will bring. They shared the experiences of local authorities including Stockport as part of the Northern Powerhouse and the importance of collaboration with the private sector in developing bids, new services and managing demand.

President Heather Barnes said: "Devolution is a multifaceted exercise, so to understand more from the Department of Communities and Local Growth about their thinking and how it is changing as we progress has been very helpful.

"Given devolution is happening at a time when most authorities are facing tremendous challenges of balancing books, yet required to provide vital services with greater efficiency, it has been a valuable forum to explore new models of working. I am clear that as councils, we need to evolve and change so innovation and creative approaches to service delivery are going to be essential.

"But we also need to recognise that this takes time, and we need room to experiment. Managing sustainable growth is our ambition, and whilst each area will have its own problems, I believe that by working across public and private sector we can ensure that communities can thrive, supported by good transport networks, proper housing, set in healthy and appealing environments."

The conference was held at Manchester Airport on 6/7 November and attended by over 120 delegates from English county, unitary and metropolitan local authorities.

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About ADEPT

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning & Transport (ADEPT) represents local authority county, unitary and metropolitan Directors. Operating at the strategic tier of local government, members are responsible for delivering public services that primarily relate to the physical environment and the economy, but which have a significant impact on all aspects of the nation's well-being. ADEPT represents members' interests by proactively engaging central Government on emerging policy & issues, promoting initiatives aimed at influencing Government policy and through the development of best practices and responding to European and UK Government initiatives and consultations.

For more information on ADEPT please visit the website: www.adeptnet.org.uk