

# Regional Development



Andrew Lewer MBE MEP

## Planning for UK Regional Development outside the EU

The Conservative Party's 2015 General Election success was built on important promises: a sound long-term economic plan and a pledge to build a truly national recovery. Our manifesto promised to raise the growth rate across England and help slower-growth areas achieve the national average by devolving real powers to deliver economic

development, transport infrastructure and social care.

As part of this, we promised more bespoke Growth Deals with local councils and support for England's 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to help them promote jobs and growth.

Andrew is now working to translate these manifesto commitments into action by examining EU regional development policy on innovation, research and development, support for SMEs, a low carbon economy, skills, employment and social inclusion.

He wants to identify how to retain those elements that have worked for the UK, while seeking savings and greater efficiency in regional development programmes as competence moves from the EU to the UK and thence to Local Authorities. ■

## Infrastructure Investment for the Future

Conservative MEPs in the European Parliament played a key role in developing and communicating the UK Government's ideas on reform and better regulation to constituents, local and regional authorities, our political partners in Europe and the EU. Regional Policy was no exception.

The UK Government's July 2014 Balance of Competences report on Cohesion Policy raised some key questions about how EU regional policy works in practice. It highlighted potential areas for reform intended to feed into new thinking on Cohesion Policy beyond 2020. For example, should the Cohesion Fund – which supports poorer EU regions – continue to be used in wealthier regions where alternative funding sources are available?



Andrew speaking in the plenary chamber

The report highlighted that, as one of 10 net contributors to the EU budget, the UK often pays money in to the EU pot only to get it back later with strings attached. These strings limited how and where our money is spent by local and regional authorities, the very people who understand best what their local economy needs in order to thrive.

This, according to Conservative Spokesman Andrew Lewer, supported the growing argument for richer Member States like the UK, Germany and Sweden to fund their own appropriately targeted regional policies as they see fit, whilst allowing decision-making to happen at the lowest possible level (the so-called subsidiarity principle).

However, the lack of enthusiasm from EU member states for such logical steps towards genuine localism has demonstrated how even relatively uncontroversial measures to modernise seem to be beyond the EU institutions at the present time. Following the UK referendum, Andrew wants to campaign for a real repatriation of regional development spending powers to our local authorities and LEPs in order to get the best deal for the UK.

Infrastructural investment at a local level will continue to be critical to the UK in a post-EU future and there is much work to do to ensure that the transition of these funds takes place smoothly. As a former County Council Leader Andrew is well placed to contribute to this process. ■

## Policy Group on Localism and Subsidiarity

### Conservative MEPs and Councillors join forces to bring your voice to Europe

As a forward-thinking political group not tied to the dogmas of the past, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) were at the forefront of generating new policy proposals to try to reform the EU.

To this end, the ECR established a number of thematic Policy Groups to develop new, evidence-based ideas for reform. The ECR Group in the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and in the European Parliament worked together on one such policy group focused on subsidiarity and localism – both issues key to regional development policy.

The main objectives of the policy group – chaired by former CoR member and Conservative Spokesman Andrew Lewer – are to pool the local, regional, national and EU experience of the whole Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists (AECR) political family to ensure that decisions are taken at the lowest practicable level.

The policy group held discussions with a range of

stakeholders to consider the cost and impact of centralising decisions in Brussels; provide recommendations on cross-cutting EU policy, such as how to achieve better regulation; and anticipated future milestones, such as the impact of post-2020 EU regional development policy on localism and subsidiarity in the EU.

A Subsidiarity Scoreboard has been developed, with help from the ECR's New Direction think-tank, with an event held at the LGA Conference in July.

In the light of the EU referendum result does this work still have UK relevance? The answer is clearly “yes” as the greater freedoms and flexibilities the UK will have outside the EU will allow us to decide which rules and regulations we retain in UK law and which we dispense with. Consideration of their adherence to subsidiarity principles will give us a clearer picture of their worth or otherwise. ■



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