

## Minutes of the Shadow HotSW Joint Committee Meeting

Council Chamber, Somerset County Council, Shire Hall, Taunton TA1 4DY

1.30pm, Tuesday 11 November 2017

### Attendance

#### Voting Members

Cllr David Fothergill	Leader, Somerset County Council
Cllr Paul Diviani	Leader, East Devon District Council
Cllr John Hart	Leader, Devon County Council
Cllr Ian Bowyer	Leader, Plymouth City Council
Cllr Andrea Davis	Deputy Chair, Exmoor National Park
Bill Hitchins	Chair, Dartmoor National Park
Cllr Clive Eginton	Leader, Mid Devon District Council
Cllr John Williams	Leader, Taunton Deane Borough Council
Cllr Des Brailey	Leader, North Devon District Council
Cllr John Tucker	Leader, South Hams District Council
Cllr Jeremy Christophers	Leader, Teignbridge District Council
Cllr Mandy Chilcott	Deputy Leader, West Somerset District Council
Cllr Ric Pallister	Leader, South Somerset District Council
Cllr Tom Killen	Deputy Leader, Mendip District Council
Cllr Dawn Hill	Deputy Leader, Sedgemoor District Council
Cllr Pete Edwards	Leader, Exeter City Council

#### Non-voting Members

Steve Hindley	Chair, Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
Annette Benny	Managing Director (Deliver) NHS NEW Devon Clinical Commissioning Group

#### Officers

Pat Flaherty	Chief Executive, Somerset County Council
Stephen Walford	Chief Executive, Mid Devon District Council
Tracey Lee	Chief Executive, Plymouth City Council
Mike Mansell	Chief Executive, North Devon District Council
Chris Garcia	Chief Executive, Heart of the South West

	Local Enterprise Partnership
Doug Bamsey	Corporate Director, Sedgemoor District Council
Brendan Cleere	Director, Growth and Development, Taunton Deane Borough Council
Kevin Bishop	Chief Executive, Dartmoor National Park
Mark Williams	Chief Executive, East Devon District Council
Steve Jordan	Executive Director and Head of Paid Service, West Devon and South Hams Councils
Phil Shears	Chief Executive – Teignbridge District Council
Chris Garcia	Chief Executive, Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
Bruce Luxton	Exeter City Council
Alison Ward	Plymouth City Council
Julian Gale	Somerset County Council
Alastair Higton	Somerset County Council
Peter Stiles	Somerset County Council
Sarah Bryan	Chief Executive, Exmoor National Park Authority
Eifion Jones	Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership

## Apologies

Mayor Gordon Oliver	Elected Mayor – Torbay Council
Steve Parrock	Chief Executive – Torbay Council
Cllr Jane Whittaker	Leader – Torridge District Council
Jenny Wallace	Chief Executive – Torridge District Council
Phil Norrey	Chief Executive – Devon County Council

### 1. Declarations of Interest

1.1 None were declared.

### 2. Minutes

2.1 The Minutes of the Shadow Joint Committee meeting held on 22 September 2017 were confirmed and signed as correct.

### 3. Chairman's Update Report

3.1 Cllr Fothergill, Somerset County Council, reported further to the meeting with Jake Berry, MP, the Minister responsible for Devolution, that his officials had asked that discussions on a devolution deal for the HotSW area should take place after the

forthcoming Budget/Autumn Statement. Sally Edgington (BIS Local Relationship manager) was also keen to take things forward. Cllr Hart, Devon County Council, added that Kevin Foster, MP for Torbay and Ministerial aide to Jake Berry had expressed his support for HotSW's initiative. Cllr Fothergill emphasised the need to establish a single of channel of communication with BEIS contacts and asked that Julian Gale/Alistair Higton be made aware of any dialogues, so as to avoid a range of separate conversations.

Cllr Fothergill referred to recent press interest in the alleged 'gagging' issue involving Paragraph 11.5 of the draft Inter-Authority Agreement on press releases and public statements and the response made to the media. Julian Gale explained that there was no intention to prevent individual constituent local authorities from expressing their own views on HotSW business and drew attention to a proposed revised wording (tabled) to remove any possible misunderstanding while maintaining the principle of collective communication for formal communications issued on behalf of the Joint Committee.

**RESOLVED:** to approve the amendment of Paragraph 11.5 of the draft Inter-Authority Agreement on the HotSW Joint Committee to read as follows:

*'All press releases and public statements to be sent out on behalf of the Joint Committee shall be the responsibility of the press office of the Administering Authority'.*

(NB. This amendment will need to be approved by constituent authorities when ratifying the proposed arrangements for the HotSW Joint Committee)

Cllr Fothergill was pleased that following clarification of certain issues Exeter City Council would formally be taking the Joint Committee proposal through their democratic process. He hoped that the Council would agree to formally join the Joint Committee as a constituent authority. The Committee supported the Chairman's proposal that Cllr Edwards, Exeter City Council, as a Labour member, should be invited to attend any future 'high-level' lobbying meetings with Ministers etc to ensure political balance.

#### **4. Establishment of a Joint Committee**

4.1 Julian Gale, Somerset County Council, gave an update on the formal approval by constituent local authorities of the proposed arrangements for the HotSW Joint Committee, indicating that assuming the necessary consents were given, the inaugural meeting of the Joint Committee would be able to take place on 26 January 2018 as planned.

#### **5. Rural Productivity Commission**

5.1 Chris Garcia, HotSW LEP and Sarah Bryan, Exmoor National Park gave a presentation on the report of the independent enquiry commissioned by four South

West LEPs to identify opportunities to stimulate rural productivity and growth which was launched at the South West Growth Summit on 20 October 2017.

5.2 The Commission was established to:

- hear and review evidence from a range of sources and stakeholders to frame the South West response to the Industrial Strategy and forthcoming DEFRA 25 year plans for 'food, farming and fisheries' and 'environment'
- draw out opportunities to drive rural productivity improvements
- understand functioning between urban and rural distinctions
- secure Government support for specific initiatives in the Autumn Statement
- influence national and local policies where appropriate to improve rural productivity.

5.3 The Commission had collected evidence through an open call for written evidence from April to June 2017 followed by five formal evidence hearings across the four LEP areas.

5.4 The most important themes that had emerged from the work were:

- digital connectivity presented a game-changing opportunity but without further urgent action businesses and communities would become left behind
- smart technologies had the potential to create solutions to many of the challenges faced by rural areas and the development of an innovation platform on a regional scale had the ability to create higher value jobs
- the rural South West hardworking and entrepreneurial culture, coupled with its stunning natural environment, with the right support, could become a hothouse of enterprise
- the South West agri-food-tourism economy was a strength upon which globally recognised propositions could be built as the place to start and build and grow a food business
- there were genuine concerns that rural communities in the South West were spiralling downwards towards 'fossilised retirement villages' unless Government and local leaders took prompt action - local and national policy must move away from the 'one size fits all' approach that failed to recognise that rural areas were different
- Brexit had the potential to shake the foundations of the South West rural economy - providing either a much needed boost or sudden economic shock. Now was the time for action if the South West was to reap the benefits in line with the Commission's recommendations.

5.5 The report and its findings - which had been endorsed by the four LEPs on 13 November 2017 - would be used to help embrace the opportunities and mitigate risks with partners in other South West LEPs, MPs, businesses and Government.

5.6 The Chairman thanked the Commission for all its hard work and commended the report which would raise the national profile of the rural South West and rural areas generally.

5.7 Chris Garcia undertook to follow up the following points raised during discussion:

- the need for training to enable those running local businesses to make better use of the opportunities for marketing through the digital infrastructure - perhaps, given the time pressures they faced, through the use of peripatetic trainers or in other imaginative ways - and greater clarity of/publicity for the benefits involved
- the need for improved digital access to Health Service advice and consultations on change
- the impact on local businesses of the loss of local banking facilities.

## **6. Productivity Strategy**

### **6.1 Portfolio Holder Event**

6.1.1 The Committee considered a report on the Portfolio Holders Engagement Forum on 7 November 2017 (copy attached to these minutes) relating to the development of a Productivity Strategy setting out the context and challenges for the HotSW area and the activities that would be required over the next 20 years to address them.

6.1.2 The report was presented by Cllr Paul Diviani, Vice-Chairman, who explained that the purpose of the event was to ensure that there was ownership and oversight of the Productivity Strategy within each authority and to give an opportunity for feedback into the consultation process.

6.1.3 Cllr Diviani outlined the conclusions which had been reached on the following areas: ambition and distinctiveness; urban versus rural challenges; and the framework for collaboration. He commented that the event had been very successful. It had shown that there was synergy in thinking, with there being common issues across the region, as well as a recognition that there were also differences, and the importance of collaboration. There were nuances which would need to be addressed within the Delivery Plan and Portfolio Holders were keen to help shape the Plan. Broadly there was an ownership developing for the Strategy and the challenge was to further develop that ownership through the organisations involved and to champion wider participation.

### **6.2 Consultation Process**

6.2.1 Tracey Lee, Plymouth City Council gave an update on the process for consultation on the draft Productivity Strategy which had commenced on 9 October 2017. Engagement was taking place through various different channels, with the

consultation being hosted online by Torbay Council as a single point for responses and a series of sub-regional/local events that had already been held or were being arranged.

6.2.2 While it was acknowledged that the organisation of sub-regional/local consultation meetings had been left to local discretion (District Councils and others), Committee members agreed there was a need for greater clarity/information sharing about what was happening where and when and, given the number of such meetings that had still to take place or be arranged. It was suggested that it would be sensible in the circumstances for the consultation period to be extended beyond 30 November 2017.

#### 6.2.3 **RESOLVED:**

(a) to extend the consultation period until 14 December 2017 to maximize the effectiveness of the response

(b) to circulate (urgently) to all Committee members a list of all the dates, times, venues and organisers for all sub-regional/local consultation events.

### 7. **Brexit Resilience and Opportunities Group**

7.1 The Committee considered a report by Alistair Higton, Somerset County Council, providing an update on the work of the Brexit Opportunities and Resilience Group (BROG) to identify the opportunities and challenges of Brexit and their impact on businesses across the Heart of the South West (HotSW), the findings and next steps and the relationship between BROG and the Joint Committee.

7.2 The workstreams involved were:

- three pieces of detailed research commissioned from Plymouth City Council into HotSW on: agriculture and land use; the construction industry and the labour market and skills
- business engagement through a survey as well as regular contact between BROG and the business community and their representatives
- development of an online knowledge hub facility to collate reports, surveys and other important documents that were Brexit related.

7.3 The report outlined findings and key messages for HotSW from the research, examples of which are set out below:

7.3.1 *Agriculture and land use* - the vital importance of agriculture to the HofSW economy; impact of end of EU subsidies; EU Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) status; strategic importance of EU market; opportunity for HotSW to influence national policy development through Rural Productivity Commission findings and otherwise

7.3.2 *Construction* - closely linked with the overall health of the economy; buyer and investor confidence and public sector investment in infrastructure; access to labour and skills and imported materials and plant, dependency on EU funds, regulation and taxation; pricing insecurity.

7.3.3 *Labour Market and Skills* - difficulty in filling lower skilled roles; possible barriers to EU citizens being able to come to the UK; implications of potential workforce reduction.

7.3.4 *HotSW Business Survey* - concerns about loss of skilled workers from EU countries and retention of easy access to EU markets post Brexit.

7.4 During discussion:

- concern was expressed regarding the impact of uncertainty about the terms of the UK's withdrawal from the EU on the construction industry and the growing shortage of workers in the care and other critical sectors due to low wage rates
- Alistair Highton agreed that BROG would look at the impact of Brexit on the education and research sectors and the numbers of overseas students coming to the UK.

7.5 **RESOLVED:**

(a) To note the work and findings of BROG to date

(b) In order to take findings forward, make and develop contacts in order to promote the opportunities of Brexit and develop resilience to risks, and without prejudice to any activities that partners wish to undertake

- BROG continue to set its work programme based on priorities that emerge as a result of movement towards Brexit, for example research and continued engagement with partner agencies and businesses including (but not limited to) in the near term:
  - issues arising from the Rural Productivity Commission Report
  - issues arising from UK/EU negotiations; and
  - any further topic that the Joint Committee wishes BROG to consider
- BROG facilitate discussion with key MPs in HotSW as part of wider partnership engagement to share findings and key messages.

8. **Next Meeting**

**RESOLVED** that the first formal meeting of the Joint Committee be held on Friday 26 January 2018 at 9.30am at the offices of Plymouth City Council.

(The meeting ended at 2.45pm)

Chairman