

Minutes of a Meeting of the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Joint Committee held at County Hall, Exeter at 10.00am on Friday 31 January 2020.

Attendance

Members:

Cllr John Hart	Leader - Devon County Council
Cllr David Fothergill	Leader - Somerset County Council (Chair)
Cllr Tudor Evans	Leader - Plymouth City Council
Cllr Steve Darling	Leader - Torbay Council
Cllr Ben Ingham	Leader - East Devon District Council
Cllr Philip Bialyk	Leader - Exeter City Council
Cllr David Worden	Leader - North Devon District Council
Cllr Malcolm Prowse	Deputy Leader - North Devon District Council
Cllr Judy Pearce	Leader - South Hams District Council
Cllr Gordon Hook	Leader - Teignbridge District Council
Cllr Alistair Dewhirst	Deputy Leader - Teignbridge District Council
Cllr Ken James	Leader - Torridge District Council
Cllr Claire Hodson	Deputy Leader - Torridge District Council
Cllr Neil Jory	Leader - West Devon Borough Council
Cllr Ros Wyke	Leader - Mendip District Council
Cllr Gill Slocombe	Deputy Leader - Sedgemoor District Council
Cllr Frederica Smith - Roberts	Leader - Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr Benet Allen	Deputy Leader - Somerset West and Taunton Council
Cllr Val Keitch	Leader - South Somerset District Council
Andrew Cooper	Dartmoor National Park Authority
Cllr Andrea Davis	Deputy Chairman - Exmoor National Park Authority
Cllr Liz Brookes-Hocking	Devon/Somerset Associations of Local Councils

Officers/Local Enterprise Partnership etc:

Phil Norrey	Chief Executive - Devon County Council
Peter Doyle	Head of External Affairs - Devon County Council
Sue Rose	Policy Lead - Devon County Council
Scott Wooldridge	Strategic Manager, Governance and Democratic Services - Somerset County Council
Michele Cusack	Director of Commissioning for Economic and Community Infrastructure and Climate Change Lead, Somerset County Council
Paula Hewitt	Director of Commissioning and Lead Commissioner

	for Economic and Community Infrastructure and Somerset County Council
Peter Stiles	Clerk to the Joint Committee - Somerset County Council
Tracey Lee	Chief Executive - Plymouth City Council and Senior Responsible Officer, Heart of the South West Partnership
Alison Ward	Regional Portfolio Manager - Plymouth City Council
Steve Parrock	Chief Executive - Torbay Council
Mark Williams	Chief Executive - East Devon District Council
Karime Hassan	Chief Executive - Exeter City Council
Stephen Walford	Chief Executive - Mid Devon District Council
Ken Miles	Chief Executive - North Devon Council
Sophie Hosking	Chief Executive - South Hams and West Devon Councils
Steve Mullineaux	Deputy Chief Executive - South Hams and West Devon Councils
Phil Shears	Chief Executive - Teignbridge District Council
Jennie Wallace	Chief Executive - Torridge District Council
Doug Bamsey	Corporate Director - Sedgemoor District Council
James Hassett	Chief Executive - Somerset West and Taunton Council
Alex Parmley	Chief Executive - South Somerset District Council
Karl Tucker	Chair - Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
David Ralph	Chief Executive - Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
Philip Clifford	Senior Adviser on Growth, Local Government Association

1. Declarations of Interest

1.01 Details of councillors' appointments to local authorities were displayed in the meeting room and therefore there was no need to verbally declare these as personal interests. There were no other declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

2.01 The Minutes of the Joint Committee meeting held on 27 September 2019 were confirmed and signed as correct.

3. Public Question Time

3.01 There were no public questions.

4. Chair's Update

4.01 The Chair, Cllr David Fothergill, reported on developments since the last (informal) Joint Committee meeting in November 2019, referring to:

- the General Election and Queen's Speech with the Government setting out its intentions for a Devolution White Paper - we had submitted our letter to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State setting out our key asks and priorities for the Heart of the South West and continued to press for an early meeting
- the national profile of the Joint Committee continuing to grow, and
- ongoing engagement with Government officials and new MPs - the Joint Committee would be asked later in the meeting to consider proposals to take forward conversations with Government to develop a Devolution Deal that delivered our asks and would also receive an update on Brexit
- we were awaiting the impending Cabinet reshuffle to press for Devolution meetings and again for the meeting requested with the Housing Minister
- the continuing work with Government and the Local Enterprise Partnership on the Local Industrial Strategy
- preparing for devolution opportunities in 2020 now being essential and, with the morning's Devolution Workshop led by Philip Clifford from the Local Government Association, this was the main focus of today's meeting, Cllr Fothergill encouraged members to be engaged so that they got the very best out of the day, as it was important that we continued to press and be ready to take the opportunities presented.

5. Heart of the South West Local Industrial Strategy (LIS)

5.01 Tracey Lee, Chief Executive, Plymouth City Council and Senior Responsible Officer, reported that the Local Industrial Strategy had been finalised and submitted to Government, but was still awaiting formal Government approval. However, it was understood that this was likely to be forthcoming soon. The Strategy would be published when it had been 'signed off'.

5.02 David Ralph, Chief Executive, Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, reported that the final draft differed little from that recently circulated (cosmetic changes only), but was available on request to Joint Committee members/officers.

6. Devolution - Next Steps

6.01 The Joint Committee considered a report by Tracey Lee drawing attention to:

- the submission of a letter and brochure to the Prime Minister (and Heart of the South West MPs) after the Election setting out HotSW's priorities in a 'Programme for Action' based on commitments in the draft Local Industrial Strategy, the Productivity Strategy, the Housing Task Force work and other areas which collectively formed its key asks and messages to the new Government
- the new Government's commitment to devolution set out in the Queen's Speech in December 2019 as a mechanism for giving more power to local areas to strengthen local decision-making; for levelling up powers across the country and addressing regional disparities; and as crucial building blocks within the larger economic Powerhouse structures
- the need to develop a response to the emerging Government policy direction on devolution to ensure that the South West was not left behind
- several proposed actions for taking forward devolution in the South West region, including re-engagement with Government on devolution and further exploring the option of creating a Combined Authority.

6.02 During an informal, 'workshop' session before the formal meeting, the Joint Committee had received a presentation from Philip Clifford of the Local Government Association giving an update on Government devolution policy, which covered 'Purpose, process and devolved powers 2014 - 16', 'Brexit, policy hiatus and a new context 2017 - 19', opportunities and challenges for local authorities, LGA activity and the future.

6.03 The following feedback emerged from Joint Committee members, in terms of their responses to two questions put to them following the presentation:

'What are your biggest hopes for, and concerns about, the Government's devolution agenda?'

'What specific aspects would you like to see covered in the report (on the Business Case for a Combined Authority)?'

Members felt that there was a need for the following:

- devolution to be 'genuine' - scope: a clear, comprehensive deal with wide-ranging powers, rights and responsibilities matched by proper levels of funding to enable delivery of post-Brexit agenda ('taking back control from central Government')
- a stable political and financial local government platform - 'local' taxation for 'local' use (NB. LGA are reviewing local government funding)

- focus on delivery of: environmental objectives/climate change; health and social care; flooding and coastal erosion; housing; tourism; agriculture; fisheries; skills training (NB. Conflicts - 'strategic v parochial; increased centralism of powers for National Parks)
- to tackle inequality both between regions, and within the South West
- recognition of diversity (urban, rural, coastal etc) and that 'one size doesn't fit all'
- a clear role for regional MPs - collective support on basis of clear evidence
- any Combined Authority to reflect the differences between constituent authority areas.

6.04 During discussion of her report, Tracey Lee, supported by the Chair, confirmed that there would be a thorough examination of all the issues involved before any firm proposals for a Combined Authority were developed.

6.05 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED**

(a) to endorse the 'Programme for Action' set out in the proposition for the Heart of the South West brochure that was sent to the Prime Minister in December 2019;

(b) to re-engage with the Government and work with civil servants and others to help shape and inform future policy around devolution, including exploring alternative governance models for large, non-metropolitan areas like the HotSW;

(c) that HotSW officers should develop a Business Case exploring the potential benefits, risks and costs of moving to a Combined Authority, and taking into account the feedback from discussions during the Devolution Workshop set out above, and that this be brought back for consideration at a future meeting.

7. Climate Emergency Update

7.01 The Joint Committee received presentations from Sue Rose, Devon County Council (on behalf of Phil Norrey, Chief Executive) and Michele Cusack, Somerset County Council on the progress being made in both counties on developing Climate Emergency Strategies. The Strategies identified ways in which, in each county, the local authorities and others could work together towards becoming carbon neutral and adapting to predicted climate change impact; they also covered evidence gathering and public consultation processes.

7.02 Discussion points - to which the officers responded - included the need to:

- recognise the holistic nature of the emergency affecting the world's natural environment ie. the threat to eco-systems (through single use plastics in the oceans etc) as well as that specifically from climate change
- invest significantly more in coastal defence in response to rising sea levels

- improve the South West rail network and thereby reduce road use and fossil fuel consumption, and for urgent electrification of the network and a joined-up approach to transport
- look into boosting tourism regionally through climate change initiatives.

8. Future of the Brexit Resilience and Opportunities Group (BROG)

8.01 The Joint Committee considered a report presented by Sue Rose giving an update on the work of the Brexit Resilience and Opportunities Group (BROG) and making recommendations on its future role.

8.02 BROG was formed by the Joint Committee following the EU Referendum to provide a strategic overview of impact and opportunity in the period leading to exiting the EU. The group, which was chaired by Phil Norrey, had a wide membership drawn from senior officers, business and community groups and civil servants and had provided a useful conduit to Government.

8.03 At its meeting in November 2018, the Joint Committee authorised BROG to move from its strategic function to an operational role, to provide direct communication with Government on the issues and impacts across Devon and Somerset in the run-up to three potential No Deal milestones.

8.04 With the Government having formally stood down all preparations for a No Deal EU Exit (Operation Yellowhammer) and the passage of the Withdrawal Agreement Bill, the UK would leave the European Union on 31 January 2020 and move into a transition/implementation period ending on 31 December 2020.

8.05 The Government had found local intelligence useful in helping with the formulation and delivery of EU Exit policy and was keen to retain these links as it developed its future economic policy. Working through the regional chief executives and the Local Government Association, Government departments were liaising with local councils, Local Enterprise Partnerships and business organisations to access this local, real-time economic intelligence. This process was already well-developed in the North and the Midlands. The Government had recognised that it was a false distinction to try and identify only those economic impacts that could be attributed to exit from the EU and was keen to understand how local economies were performing irrespective of cause.

8.06 In the circumstances, it was proposed that BROG should revert to its original strategic function providing evidence to inform forthcoming legislation and consultations on the economic future of the Heart of the South West such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

8.07 Discussion points included: the group's role and the need for its work to benefit the South West and local communities as well as Government. It was noted that the group would continue to report to the Leaders/Joint Committee.

8.08 The Joint Committee **RESOLVED**

(a) to approve the Group returning to a strategic role, providing evidence to Whitehall on the HotSW perspective for rebalancing the UK economy

(b) to approve the change of the name of the group from the Brexit Resilience and Opportunities Group (BROG) to Heart of the South West Economic Resilience and Opportunities Group (HEROG) to reflect this wider role.

9. Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership Update

9.01 David Ralph referred to matters including:

- the formal publication of the Great South West prospectus and its submission to Government
- the launch of Maritime UK South West which was designed to build stronger links between the South West marine and maritime sector and the Government
- the establishment of Town Deal Boards for Torquay, Bridgwater and Glastonbury to help develop investment plans and funding bids under the Government's Town Deal initiative
- the forthcoming annual performance assessment of the contribution of LEP activity to wider economic growth across the area
- being on target to deliver Growth Deal projects within the timeframe set by Government
- a major funding bid to Government for digital implementation
- the establishment and valuable contribution of the LEP's Skills Advisory Boards
- dialogue with Government about European Structural and Investment Funds and what would replace them now that the UK had left the EU
- Karl Tucker having now taken over as Chair of HotSW LEP
- business support related activities - notably in relation to Flybe and the welcome outcome
- progress on Productivity Strategy delivery.

10. Forward Plan and SRO Update

10.1 Tracey Lee reported on work in progress and the Joint Committee's forward plan which included: 'deep dive' on the Productivity Plan; delivery of the Local Industrial Strategy; updates on Peninsula Transport and Great South West; 'fit' of HotSW plans/strategies; Inclusive Growth; 'public affairs' work (engagement).

11. Chair's Closing Remarks

11.01 The Chair concluded the meeting by saying that the Joint Committee was continuing to make a difference and our focus for 2020 was securing Government support towards working with us to deliver our priorities. He thanked everyone for their contributions during the meeting which helped to maintain the momentum. The next Joint Committee meeting would be held at County Hall, Exeter on Friday 27 March 2020 (noon).

(The meeting ended at 12.53pm)

Chair