

**Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Joint Committee held under the Coronavirus Regulations, 2020 on Friday 12 March 2021 at 12.00 noon.**

**Attendance**

**Members:**

Cllr Val Keitch	Leader - South Somerset District Council (Chair)
Cllr Tudor Evans	Leader - Plymouth City Council (Vice-Chair)
Cllr John Hart	Leader - Devon County Council
Cllr Steve Darling	Leader - Torbay Council
Cllr Philip Bialyk	Leader - Exeter City Council
Cllr Bob Deed	Leader - Mid Devon District Council
Cllr David Worden	Leader - North Devon District Council
Cllr Claire Hodson	Deputy Leader - Torridge District Council
Cllr David Fothergill	Leader - Somerset County Council
Cllr Ros Wyke	Leader - Mendip District Council
Cllr Benet Allen	Deputy Leader - Somerset West and Taunton Council
Andrew Cooper	Devon 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
Phill Adams	Senior Manager, Skills - Devon County Council
Sue Rose	Policy Lead - Devon 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
Anne-Marie Bond	Chief Executive - Torbay Council
Karime Hassan	Chief Executive - Exeter City Council
Anne-Marie Bond	Chief Executive - Torbay Council
Stephen Walford	Chief Executive - Mid Devon District Council
Steve Mullineaux	Deputy Chief Executive - South Hams District Council/West Devon Borough Council
Ken Miles	Chief Executive - North Devon Council
Steve Hearse	Chief Executive - Torridge District Council
Scott Wooldridge	Strategic Manager, Governance and Democratic Services - Somerset County Council

Paula Hewitt	Director of Commissioning and Lead Director, Economic and Community Infrastructure - Somerset County Council
Peter Stiles	Clerk to the Joint Committee - Somerset County Council
Doug Bamsey	Deputy Chief Executive - Sedgemoor District Council
Stuart Brown	Chief Executive - Mendip 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
Rosa Payne	Homes England

## **1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Cllr Alistair Dewhurst - Teignbridge District Council  
Cllr Ken James - Torridge District Council  
Pat Flaherty - Somerset County Council  
Cllr Liz Leyshon - Mendip District Council  
Cllr Gill Slocombe and Bob Brown - Sedgemoor District Council  
Cllr Federica Smith-Roberts - Somerset West and Taunton Council  
Pamela Wood - Dartmoor National Park Authority  
Paul Johnson - Devon Clinical Commissioning Group  
Ian Collinson - Homes England  
Suzanne Bond and Kate Goodenough - BEIS

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

## **3. Minutes of the Previous HotSW Joint Committee Meeting**

The Minutes of the Joint Committee meeting held on 29 January, 2021 were confirmed and signed as correct, subject to: the Chair, Cllr Val Keitch being moved from the list of those present to the list of apologies for absence; Cllr Benet Allen being added to the list of those present; and Cllr Tudor Evans being shown as having Chaired the meeting.

#### **4. Public Question Time**

There were no public questions.

#### **5. Building Back Better**

The Joint Committee considered a report presented by David Ralph, Chief Executive, HotSW Local Enterprise Partnership setting out a revised draft version of the Build Back Better document endorsed at its last meeting.

The revised draft was more closely focused on the transformational opportunities flowing from structural challenges and opportunities identified in the Local Industrial Strategy, which in many cases the Covid-19 pandemic had exacerbated.

The report set out the responses received from partners to a consultation on the emerging Build Back Better document which confirmed clear support for the concept, with stakeholders pleased to see that it reflected the Local Industrial Strategy. However, the feedback had suggested that refinements could be made to the structure and content of the document, which had been responded to and appropriate changes made.

Developments since the last meeting included the announcement in the Budget of several new funding streams such as the Levelling Up Fund and Community Renewal Fund. Details on others such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund were still to be confirmed and given the severity of Covid there might be other opportunities for the HotSW area which were yet to emerge. The Budget also saw the publication of the Government's own Build Back Better plan which focused on infrastructure, skills, innovation, levelling up, net zero carbon emissions and Global Britain. While there was a change in emphasis and language in economic development terms, Government proposals were still broadly in line with previous strategies.

David Ralph commented that HotSW Build Back Better offered a compelling proposition for the area setting out ambitions for delivering a stronger, greener and more inclusive future and a way to open a discussion with Government on how this part of the UK could play its part in national recovery from Covid.

David thanked all partners for their continuing support for Covid recovery.

#### **RESOLVED**

(a) to endorse the publication of the HotSW Build Back Better plan as a tool to open a conversation with Government on the transformational opportunities in the area

(b) to note that the plan was still draft and agree to delegate final sign-off to the Chair.

## **6. HotSW Skills Update**

The Joint Committee considered a report presented by Phill Adams, Senior Manager, Skills, Devon County Council providing an update on the current skills environment across Plymouth, Torbay, Devon and Somerset.

The report referred to:

- skills and employment challenges and opportunities within the HotSW area
- current projects and programmes across the area
- the establishment of the South West Skills Advisory Panel, and associated Local Skills Report/Skills Strategy
- proposals for further development of the skills landscape through the Government's Skills White Paper.

Salient matters included:

- Skills performance and its knock-on impact on wages and in-work progression remained a key differential between HotSW and other areas in terms of productivity and prosperity
- Core indicators suggested that HotSW remained mid-table overall for skills and employment but continued to trail on higher level skills achievement compared to the rest of the UK
- However, HotSW's relative position had improved over the past five years
- Performance within HotSW was among the most varied in the UK - it still contained some of the strongest and weakest performing areas in the South West around key educational and progression indicators
- Recent work by HotSW partners suggested that the most significant challenges remained around relative disadvantage
- the ageing population and concerns about level of skilled workers lost from the workforce in the next 10 - 15 years
- The HotSW economy had suffered an unprecedented peacetime shock over the past 12 months as a result of Covid and was likely to take several years to recover
- Employment impact had been dramatic but very mixed. Core sectors such as health, agriculture and public services had seen limited impact to date, while hospitality had seen between 20% and 40% impact
- Unemployment had doubled or tripled in all areas. However, furlough had so far protected large parts of the workforce
- There had been a disproportionate impact on young people, with youth unemployment climbing the fastest and highest of any sub-group

- However, apprenticeship numbers had held up better than elsewhere and NEET numbers for those below 19 had remained relatively stable in most areas
- The year to come was likely to be mixed, with education having been disrupted for nearly two full academic years by September
- The HotSW response involved: strengthened local skills leadership and intelligence; a shared skills strategy and approach; and accelerated and expanded delivery, including additional recovery activity
- Skills leadership in HotSW was now the responsibility of a Skills Advisory Panel, a formal partnership rolled out by the Department of Education to every LEP area. Membership was limited to 20, with a focus on business representatives and FE/training provider leads
- Every SAP was required to produce an annual report setting out a core vision and priorities and actions for skills and employment.
- The HotSW Local Skills Report, its core vision and key priorities, key sectors, geography, actions and next steps now that it was broadly complete and had been 'signed off' by most stakeholders (Phill Adams agreed to include reference to Taunton and Bridgwater in the list of areas within HotSW that were recognised as having differing skills and labour markets)
- The Government's Skills White Paper, its focus on business-led provision and accountability and the belief of local partners across HotSW that they were in a good position to bid for 'trailblazer' status for areas that worked together to develop a shared funded skills strategy which could lead to significant additional funding and flexibility
- Additional support and opportunities around skills and employment made available in the Budget
- Partner-led activity on skills development initiatives e.g. EU Social Fund; South West Institute of Technology; Digital Skills Partnership
- The need to clarify future funding arrangements for the HotSW Careers Hub, the joint £700,000 annual programme to support careers information advice and guidance across the HotSW, currently funded by the HotSW LEP, Careers Enterprise Company/DfE and four upper-tier local authorities (the Government recently enhanced the role of the Careers Hub through the Skills White Paper, reaffirming the long-term approach, though this was based on local authorities and their partners in individual areas continuing to provide significant match funding for the service)
- The case for future funding of the HotSW Careers Hub, one of the country's strongest performing hubs (covering 160 schools and colleges with 14 advisors/co-ordinators working with around 25,000 students a year) from either provision of additional Government support or pursuing local funding.

## **RESOLVED**

(a) to note the portrait of the skills environment outlined, both recent and ongoing challenges, but also the significant progress being made by local partners to address these

(b) to endorse the draft Local Skills Report annexed to the main report

(c) to endorse the pursuit of 'trailblazer' status for local areas, working closely with Chambers, FE and Training/Education providers and wider stakeholder partners to secure additional recognition of the strength of the area's skills partnership approach

(d) to support the case for future funding of the HotSW Careers Hub, ideally through securing additional funding from Government, or through agreement of a sustained local approach

## **7. Updates on Heart of the South West Economic Opportunities and Resilience Group (HEROG), Coastal Communities Plan and Housing Task Force**

### **(1) HEROG**

Phil Norrey reported as follows on progress on implementing HEROG's approved work programme:

- *Support for business especially SMEs in adapting to new regulatory regimes in EU trade and in response to recovery from the economic shocks of Covid - work had included: exploring gaps and issues in EU transitional D20 as well as Covid response and recovery initiatives which had been raised with Government departments and solutions offered; detailed assessment and analysis of the impact of Covid particularly on the cultural and creative industries which had been shared with DCMS and received a positive response; gap analysis of business grant initiatives shared with BEIS*
- *Addressing potential disadvantage to agriculture, land-based industries and fishing relating to state aid rules and other issues - with a focus on getting evidence to the EFRA Committee inquiry into meat and seafood border and trade issues with EU (the announcement that full imposition of border controls would be deferred for six months would help the agricultural and fishing industries but there were major issues still to be resolved, particularly the immediate impact on the shellfish sector)*
- *Supporting the Joint Committee with economic evidence and business intelligence to press for a fair share of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and levelling up funding*
- *Continuing to support business sector opportunities as they arose and pressing Government to establish the South West Food Hub*

- *Developing a HotSW position on collaboration between the hospitality, tourism and business sectors and local authorities to lobby for the safe reopening of beaches and tourism* - a national group on beaches and tourism on which the South West was well represented had been reconvened which would meet for a second time on 17 March; a HotSW workshop event would be held on 23 March to bring together business sector representatives and local authorities to work not only a safe reopening but also focus within the context of Covid on a good visitor experience, allaying concerns of residents about large influxes of visitors to their localities, alleviating parking issues and managing pressure on the motorway and trunk road system.

## **(2) Coastal Communities Plan**

Anne-Marie Bond reported that a Coastal Group had been formed to help deliver the HotSW Coastal Productivity Plan as revised to reflect the extent of the economic impacts of Covid on coastal economies and recent changes in Government policy. She undertook to update the Joint Committee on the work of the Coastal Group after its first meeting in April.

## **(3) Housing Task Force**

Steve Walford reported that the next meeting of the Housing Task Force was due to take place shortly when it would focus on the impacts of Covid on housing delivery in the short term and opportunities for future influence. He undertook to update the Joint Committee on the work of the Task Force after its upcoming meeting.

## **8. Communications and Engagement Update**

The Chair reported that a reply had not yet been received to the letter from the Joint Committee to Luke Hall, MP, Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government inviting him to attend a future meeting of the Joint Committee but that the matter was being followed up. She referred to the heavy workload reflecting the Joint Committee's busy agenda and emphasised the importance of maintaining dialogue with Government and stakeholders.

## **9. Chair's Closing Remarks and Dates of Next Meetings**

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and report authors and others for their contributions. She reminded Joint Committee members of the dates of the next two meetings, as follows:

25 June 2021

1 October 2021

(The meeting ended at 12.50pm)