

**HEART OF THE SOUTH WEST (HOTSW) LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP
(LEP) JOINT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

21 October 2021

Present:-

Councillors J Brook (Chair), J Morrish, I Roome, Bown, N Bye, R Habgood (Substitute) and C Penberthy

Apologies:-

Councillors R Williams, M Douglas-Dunbar, B Wakeham and C Eginton

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J Hodgson

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Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2021 be signed as a correct record.

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Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

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LEP Update

(Councillor Hodgson attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 (2)(a) and spoke to this item).

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership which provided a general update from the LEP including actions taken since the last meeting of the Committee. Key messages from the Report included the impact of Covid-19 on a number of areas including a significant fall in GDP and the acceleration of many trends that preceded the pandemic such as the increasing digitalisation of businesses.

Member discussion points included:

- continued uncertainty regarding the LEP Review, where the future of the Local Enterprise Partnership was not clear. It was explained to Members that whilst the uncertainty was impacting the capacity of the LEP in some areas and that the early evidence suggested that greater centralisation would be Government's chosen route, the LEP still had an extensive agenda to deliver across the region including plans to Build Back Better; and

- difficulty filling job vacancies across the region. This was attributed to a number of factors such as a high average age in some areas, changing priorities after the ending of the furlough scheme, and the impact of Brexit on the availability of migrant workers.

Members noted the Report.

* **13** **Productivity Strategy Delivery**

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership which provided an update on progress on the delivery of the Productivity Strategy.

The Productivity Strategy set out how the South West would address its long-standing productivity challenges, namely that people and businesses in the area had to work longer hours to produce the same level of output as those in other areas across the country. The Strategy was made available at [Productivity - Heart of the south west LEP \(heartofswlep.co.uk\)](https://heartofswlep.co.uk) and the delivery plan was made available at [HotSW Partnership Productivity Strategy Delivery Plan \(heartofswlep.co.uk\)](https://heartofswlep.co.uk).

Three high percentage opportunities (HPOs) were particularly highlighted in discussion. These were developed alongside the Department for International Trade and covered green aviation, marine and photonics.

Member discussion centred around the importance of inclusive growth, ensuring that residents of the area are re-skilled as appropriate and not left behind. It was advised that a report would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee which would focus on this.

Members noted the report.

* **14** **Growth Deal**

(Councillor Hodgson attended in accordance with Standing Order 25 (2)(a) and spoke to this item).

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership which provided a draft end of programme report to capture key lessons learned. The Growth Deal programme had completed spend in March 2021.

There was some Member concern that the Lessons for Future Programmes represented a 'business as usual' approach where an alternative, people-led approach was more appropriate due to the Coronavirus pandemic and other challenges such as climate change.

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Digital Connectivity

The Committee considered the Report of the Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership which provided Members with an overview on the LEP's Digital Transformation plan. Highlights from the report included:

- the Heart of the South West LEP had invested more money in the digital sector than any other LEP in the country;
- the overall Broadband coverage had reached 95% across the region, with various implementation challenges delaying the delivery of digital infrastructure in 'hard to reach' areas;
- an agreement had been reached with Government to ringfence £8 million from Growth Deal 3 to further the Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) program; and
- the LEP Board had agreed 6 future principles for future funding of digital investment.

The Digital Strategy was made available at [Heart of the South West Digital Strategy \(heartofswlep.co.uk\)](https://heartofswlep.co.uk).

Member discussion centred around the challenges faced by those living in rural regions across the South West and concern that they were being neglected in terms of digital connectivity whilst more urban areas received high levels of investment. Members argued that this problem had been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic, which had had a significant impact on the number of people working from home and doing online shopping, as well as other behavioural shifts. In the discussion, it was highlighted to Members that the cost of providing fibre broadband to many of these rural areas was incredibly high, and that satellite technology would be the most likely solution, but that this technology required more research and development before it could be rolled out. The Committee was assured that digital connectivity remained a high priority for the LEP.

Members noted the Report.

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Scrutiny Work Programme

RESOLVED that the work programme be agreed.

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Dates of Future Meetings

Dates of Future Meetings were noted as:

10 February 2022, 2.15pm;
16 June 2022, 2.15pm.

HEART OF THE SOUTH WEST (HOTSW) LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (LEP) JOINT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
21/10/21

***DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 3.45 pm