

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

9 February 2023

Present:-

Councillors J Brook (Chair), R Chesterton, I Roome, N Bye, C Penberthy, Clist and Ewings

Apologies:-

Councillors B Spencer

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillors J Hart and J Hodgson

* 30

Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 October 2022 be signed as a correct record.

* 31

Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 32

Devolution Deal Update (Future Arrangements of Scrutiny)

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

Members received an update from the Programme Director (Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Devolution) regarding progress on the devolution deal since the last meeting of this committee, in particular regarding the future of Scrutiny under the proposed Combined Authority.

Councillors were advised that since the last meeting of the committee, there was no major update except that conversations were ongoing and were positive. The specific arrangements applying to scrutiny were still subject to agreement with the Government; however members were assured that scrutiny formed an important role within the proposed framework. The overall approach to scrutiny was that its role in relation to the LEP would transfer over to the devolution arrangements and be applied to the Combined Authority. In addition, it was the intention that the role of scrutiny would be naturally expanded in scope, as the Combined Authority would have more diverse responsibility than that of the LEP as it currently existed.

Key Scrutiny functions under the proposed arrangements would be:

- To review and scrutinise decision made regarding any Combined Authority function;
- To make recommendations to the Combined Authority's functions;
- To recommend around wider matters which affect the Combined Authority's area;
- The power to call-in decisions if unimplemented.

It was explained to the scrutiny committee that although the majority of members of the scrutiny committee would have to come from the constituent authorities (Devon, Plymouth and Torbay in the case of the proposed Combined Authority), there was provision for non-constituent authority members (such as district members) and wider (such as business community members) to be included.

Members saw this as an opportunity to review the scrutiny functions of the committee, noting that there were several considerations to be had and challenges to be thought on. In particular:

- That due consideration would be needed regarding proportionality of membership on any future scrutiny body that is covering numerous different local authority areas;
- The possibility of duplication where actions may be being scrutinised on various levels (such as committees at combined authority, county council, and district level) and the importance of developing working practices that avoid this duplication, getting the best value out of any future scrutiny arrangements. Members wished to ensure that collaboration across all levels would form part of the future arrangements;
- The importance of attendance at scrutiny bodies and its link to ensuring effective scrutiny and that demonstrating the value of scrutiny to those involved could incentivise participation.

It was stressed to members that, although there was uncertainty around timeframes, talks were progressing productively and that robust and effective scrutiny formed an important aspect of any future deal.

* 33

LEP Update

The committee received an update from Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership on progress by the LEP since the last meeting.

The national context of the cost-of-living crisis, labour market issues and problems with supply chains meant a great degree of uncertainty for the

undertakings of the Local Enterprise Partnership. Members were advised that overall the LEP's direction was towards devolution, and that the functions of the LEP were intended to be amalgamated into the wider functions of the future Combined Authority. There were some complexities around the changing geography of these functions in that Somerset were not pursuing a devolution deal alongside Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay.

The LEP's 2023-24 priorities were highlighted, with the core proposition being that of continuity in relation to the application of the Build Back Better plan and delivery of inclusive and clean growth and economic development. A work programme would also be developed to avoid duplication between the functions of the LEP, the Greater South West partnership (which included Cornwall and Dorset), and local authorities.

Member discussion centred on:

- The impact of general economic uncertainty and what effect this was having on investment into the area. Members were advised that there was some investor caution, but that the region had strengths in energy and food security which were important in the current national landscape. It was also stated that the prevailing view of the South West by the Government was that it was politically safe for them and therefore not a policy priority, but that this was showing signs of changing, which could incentivise support from Central Government;
- Ongoing social mobility work headed by the University of Exeter and the role of the LEP in this. It was explained to the scrutiny committee that members of the LEP were involved in this work, and that the LEP had had input into the recommendations of a report produced by the Social Mobility Commission, but that it was not a Local Enterprise Partnership-managed programme. The poor performance of the region in terms of social mobility was also highlighted, with additional future recommendations from the commission hoped for.

* 34

Scrutiny Work Programme

It was agreed that the next meeting shall focus on:

- social mobility;
- housing delivery.

Future items would depend on the future of the LEP and therefore the scrutiny committee.

* **35** **Dates of Future Meetings**

Dates of Future Meetings were noted as:

8 Jun 2023 2.15 pm
12 Oct 2023 2.15 pm
8 Feb 2024 2.15 pm

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

The Meeting started at 2.17 pm and finished at 3.38 pm