

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

8 June 2023

Present:-

Councillors J Brook (Chair), R Chesterton, A Billings, I Tuffin, G Yardy and S Coles

Apologies:-

Councillors C Cree, S Clist and E Hobbs

* 36

Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2023 be signed as a correct record.

* 37

Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 38

Committee Political Balance

This was raised as previously Somerset County Council and the districts in Somerset had six total seats. This was in line with Devon and its districts. However, in light of the unitary status of Somerset Council, it was suggested that the political balance of the committee be reviewed.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Brook, **SECONDED** by Councillor Coles and

RESOLVED that the representation of Somerset Council on this Committee be amended to four members.

* 39

Devolution Deal - Update

Members received a presentation from the Programme Lead – Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Devolution, updating them on progress on the proposed Devolution Deal since the last meeting of this committee.

For the benefit of new committee members, it was explained that although this committee focused on the Local Enterprise Partnership, there were arrangements on the horizon regarding a combined Devon, Plymouth and Torbay authority which would incorporate LEP functions alongside many others. It was explained that Somerset was not part of the combined authority

proposals; however Somerset was part of the larger conversation regarding how best to disaggregate responsibilities between the proposed combined authority and the newly-formed Somerset Council as a unitary authority.

It was explained that previously, Government had chosen to focus on implementing deals with those areas of the country that had opted for a mayoral system. However, owing to difficulties in some areas in delivering this (such as political opinion), Government had recently progressed discussions with those interested in implementing a non-mayoral system. This included the proposed combined authority of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay.

Members heard that although discussions had progressed quickly, due to purdah surrounding local elections discussions had to cease in the period leading up to the meeting of this committee and had only recently resumed. A formal offer of a deal from Government was hoped for by Autumn 2023.

Members were advised that discussions were changing frequently and that the specific arrangements were uncertain and constantly evolving.

* **40** **Economic Inclusion and Social Mobility in the Heart of the South West**

Members received a presentation on Economic Inclusion and Social Mobility across the Heart of the South West area.

A Social Mobility Commission headed by the University of Exeter had been established and had met multiple times. Its strong focus was on education with young people at its heart, aiming to increase young peoples prospects through avenues such as higher education and apprenticeships.

This body was necessitated by research that had shown that the South West was one of the poorest performing areas in the country with regards to social mobility. Members were presented with a number of statistics regarding education, pay, productivity; these highlighted the challenges faced within the area in relation to the rest of the country, and the specific impacts of deprivation on educational and financial outcomes.

However it was also highlighted that education was not the sole focus or solution to these challenges. Focus should also be on creating successful local economies and promoting diversity and inclusion.

* **41** **Local Enterprise Partnership Update**

Members considered the report of and update by the Chief Executive of the Heath of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

The report provided an overview of the Heart of the South West and the future of LEP funding, among other areas. In particular:

- The overall labour market within the Heart of the South West had not recovered to pre-COVID levels; the Coronavirus pandemic saw a mass exodus of people from the labour market, with a slow return post-pandemic. As such many employers in the area have reported recruitment and retention difficulties;
- The Chancellor had announced that he was minded to cease Government support for LEPs from April 2024. This was not a certainty and no decisions had been made.

In the update, an overview of the pathway of LEPs since their establishment, and since the setting up of this scrutiny committee, was given to Members, for the benefit of new members of this committee. In particular it was highlighted that LEPs were no longer recipients of large amounts of public money and that the majority of the Heart of the South West LEP's capital funding had been spent.

One area that the LEP continued to be involved in was business support. It had had £300,000 funding confirmed for 2023-24 for their Growth Hub, a team of business advisors who support businesses in seeking grants and providing other advisory support.

In member discussion, it was explained that the LEP has approximately £1 million of unallocated funding that they intended to give out as grants. They also had a loan fund of approximately £15 million: the LEP's investment committee was being consulted regarding how best to use this money.

The LEP was also planning to undertake an impact study on its spending which the Chief Executive was content to bring to a future meeting of this committee.

* **42** **Scrutiny Work Programme**

In considering the work programme, it was agreed that the following topics be included in the work programme:

- LEP Loan Fund
- Impact Study on LEP Projects

* **43** **Dates of Future Meetings**

Dates of Future Meetings were noted as;

12 October 2023
8 February 2024

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
8/06/23

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 3.22 pm