

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

17 October 2019

Present:-

Councillors J Brook (Chair), R Hosking, J Brazil, G Derrick and Spencer

Apologies:-

Councillors R Bloxham, M Lewis and J Morris

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor J Hodgson

* 22

Election of Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor J Brook be elected Chair for the ensuing year.

* 23

Election of Vice Chair

RESOLVED that Councillor R Williams be elected Vice Chair for the ensuing year.

* 24

Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2019 be signed as a correct record.

* 25

Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 26

Joint Scrutiny LEP Review

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

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Scrutiny reviewing the effectiveness of the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Joint Scrutiny Committee, following a year since the Committee was established. The Report captured the views of Members as well as canvassing National County and Unitary Councils to understand their Scrutiny arrangements for the LEP. Initial views appeared to suggest that the current arrangements were having some impact, however they had further to go, and that HotSW LEP Scrutiny arrangements were more developed than in many other authorities.

The Report proposed some changes to arrangements to help strengthen the transparency and quality of Scrutiny, but suggested that the current set up, membership and frequency of meetings was maintained. Any substantive changes agreed in principle by the HotSW LEP would require approval of the constituent authorities and would potentially require wider consideration across the Heart of the South West Councils.

Key areas that Members thought had gone well included:

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- Masterclasses and information – with Members having a much better understanding of the work of the LEP and their strategy for investment;
- the technical logistics, support and running of the meetings; and,
- ample opportunity for Members to speak at meetings.

Identified areas for improvement included:

- a greater focus on the Local Industrial Strategy and the value for money that the LEP afforded;
- analysing practical, active items where Scrutiny could add value including financial outcomes,
- looking at real examples of organisations that had received funding, as well as those who had been rejected; and,
- focussing on producing recommendations that were relevant, timely and useful for LEP decision-making.

Members' discussion points with officers included:

- the endorsement of additional considerations, such as webcasting and public participation, to improve the transparency and openness of the Committee, in line with Devon County Council procedures;
- allowing members of the public the opportunity to express or raise points with the LEP, that can be further investigated by the Committee;
- the benefit of conducting Task Group reviews into specific areas of the LEP, such as the review of current projects and value for money the LEP provides;
- the challenge of actively scrutinising the LEP when funds had already been allocated and projects begun;
- the need for Scrutiny to have sight of policies before they are agreed and implemented by the LEP, to add value and effectiveness to the governance process;
- the requirement of the Committee to scrutinise strategic documents and the cost effectiveness of the LEP;
- the Annual Meeting of the LEP Board would take place on Monday 4 November at the Riviera Centre, Torbay; and
- Committee Members would have sight of the draft LIS for comment to be included as feedback to the next HotSW Joint Committee in November 2019.

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

RESOLVED

- (a) that the progress of the Heart of the South West (HotSW) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Joint Scrutiny Committee be noted and current arrangements be continued;
- (b) that the terms of reference of the Committee be amended as outlined in Part 4 of the Report, to include proactive Scrutiny of the Local Industrial Strategy;
- (c) that future meetings be webcast to continue to increase transparency of the Committee;
- (d) that public participation be adopted at future Committee meetings in line with Devon County Council's public participation scheme;
- (e) that the Committee write to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to express serious concerns over the confidential nature of the Local Industrial Strategy, preventing the Committee from undertaking public scrutiny;
- (f) that work continued to improve the effectiveness of the Joint LEP Scrutiny Committee; and,

- (g) that any changes proposed would be subject to the approval of the Constituent Authorities and may require wider consideration across the Heart of the South West Councils.

* **27** **Digital Activity**

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

The Committee received a presentation on the Heart of the South West Digital Strategy, highlighting the area's ambition to be a Digital Leader in both a rural and urban context. This was against a backdrop of national sub-regional and local policies, all of which placed considerable emphasis on digital transformation and the importance of technology.

Considerable investment had already been made to extend the availability of faster and reliable broadband across the HotSW area. It had been recognised that this needed to go further, however the strategy validated the investment as the cornerstone to a flourishing and competitive economy.

The 2018 Tech Nation report estimated that the value of UK's Digital Tech economy was worth £184bn. Technology was also responsible for driving a new wave of innovation – particularly in support of environmental sustainability through smart solutions deployed on a large scale. This could also be seen in the public sector, where digital transformation was driving efficiency and supporting the delivery of new services, increasing productivity, helping businesses to grow, supporting inclusive communities, protecting the environment and attracting investment.

The Strategy informed a set of priorities framed around:

- Digitally skilled people;
- Digitally driven growth;
- Digitally integrated places; and
- Digitally connected communities.

The Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS) programme had improved broadband coverage – connecting over 290,000 premises in its first phase and stimulating the private sector to provide greater levels of connectivity in commercial areas. However, coverage of both fixed line broadband and mobile connectivity remained patchy and the Strategy acknowledged the need to tackle the digital divide across the area.

Members discussion points included:

- the need to push for greater broadband connectivity in rural areas, to help support the growth of local businesses;
- there was an increasing number of businesses choosing to locate to more rural areas due to better connectivity in certain areas;
- the take up of superfast broadband was just below the national average in Devon and would require further marketing and resources to increase this;
- the need to analyse figures of take up rates across the county to be able to see where it is working, and which areas require further work and support;
- being able to access and connect hard to reach groups and whether funding had been utilised to achieve this; and,
- mobile coverage had improved but was still patchy in some areas.

(The presentation is attached to the minutes)

* **28** **Scrutiny Work Programme**

In considering the work programme, it was **RESOLVED** that the work programme be agreed with the addition of items added at the meeting:

- The Comprehensive Spending Review
- Progress on Inclusive Growth
- Local Industrial Strategy (to include climate change strategy)
- White paper on regional developments

* **29** **Dates of Future Meetings**

Dates of Future Meetings were noted as:

Thursday 13 February 2020 @ 2.15pm
Thursday 18 June 2020 @ 2.15 pm
Thursday 22 October 2020 @ 2.15 pm
Thursday 11 February 2021 @ 2.15 pm

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

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 4.05 pm