

Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP
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Dear Robert,

DEVON DEVOLUTION DEAL

I am writing on behalf of Devon County Council, the eight District Councils in Devon and the Dartmoor National Park Authority to register our interest in a discussion, in advance of the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper, about a Devon Devolution Deal. Devon's local authorities have unanimously welcomed the opportunity for a county deal and want to make progress as quickly as possible. Our aspirations for Devon over the next 10 to 20 years are to build on economic opportunities - such as the potential for renewable energy and our world-leading climate science and data expertise - and tackle the deep-rooted problems of inequality and social mobility which reflect Devon's demography and rurality.

The ten local authorities (including the Dartmoor National Park Authority), working alongside town and parish councils, have forged a partnership of equals over the last 18 months. Our joint decisions about the use of Covid-19 funding; sharing of resources and mutual aid have been critical to the success of Devon's response to the pandemic. This strength, confidence and trust provide the platform to move forward with levelling up Devon. In order to do that we will need some specific flexibilities from Government and the ability to take control over some of the resources which currently rest with Departments.

Whilst the starting point is the administrative area of Devon, I have had initial conversations with the leaders of both Plymouth City Council and Torbay Council. There are priorities and areas of mutual shared interest - such as the Plymouth & South Devon Freezone and affordable housing - elements of which could potentially be delivered as strands of a Devon Devolution Deal. I will also be liaising with Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset to discuss opportunities across the Great South West for a coordinated approach to transport, research & development, and the transition to a zero-carbon economy which best reflects our rural peninsula.

We are engaging with Devon businesses across a range of projects to better understand their needs around workforce, leadership and management, connectivity and innovation. As a small business economy, we recognise the need to drive inclusive and sustainable growth through working closely with our business community. We have support in principle from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise

Partnership for the approach we intend to take. The county's key employers, businesses, higher and further education institutions are amongst the stakeholders who would be key partners in our deal.

The Prime Minister said in his 15 July speech on levelling up that in return for a plan for strong accountable leadership, he would give counties the tools to change their area for the better. I am keen to share with you our ideas about how the profile of local leaders can be raised and discuss the form of governance arrangement that would be best suited to the deal we want to strike.

In the short-term, we would like to focus on some specific deliverables such as:

- Creating a local reinvestment pool for resources through piloting a new approach to the receipts from right-to-buy and devolved funds such as the One Public Estate's Land Release Funds and Housing Infrastructure Funds as a way of increasing the build of social housing and affordable homes for key workers.
- Supporting local regeneration and investment in coastal and market towns, by combining local authority capital budgets and private sector funding with local control over levelling up funds, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Town Deals and Future High Street Funds.
- Building on the Local Skills Improvement Plan model, pool skills and training funds from across Adult Education Budget, National Skills Fund and National Retraining Scheme, with UK Shared Prosperity funding and DfE Capital funds, with locally raised funding into a Devon single pot to support retraining and upskilling as part of a set of measures to target and address low pay, family poverty and raise business productivity.
- Maximise the use of a pupil premium for 16-19 year olds, extend Opportunity Areas in key towns, extend the careers hub to include primary schools and devolve national career service responsibilities and funds, National Apprenticeship Service and Apprenticeship Ambassador Network, raising individual aspirations and promoting improved social mobility.

In the longer-term we will use a Devon Devolution Deal to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local public services that matter most to local people. We see it as the catalyst for reviewing the benefits of a single waste collection and management system across the county and, more broadly, to embed best practice in service delivery across the whole of the county. A Devon Devolution Deal would be central to take forward our clean growth agenda and the work of the climate emergency partnership in creating a net zero carbon Devon with key priorities for transport, housing, energy and land use.

A Devon Devolution Deal would build on collaboration with the full range of Government Departments. For example, we are already working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care on ways to address shared challenges in relation to the social care workforce and would want to embrace the outcomes in our devolution deal.

Our expectation is that the deal will reflect the untapped potential for local people and communities, with the right kind of help and support, to take more control over the things that are most important to them. A deal will be central to Exeter as a driving force for levelling up Devon and the wider region.

I look forward to beginning the journey towards a Devon Devolution Deal that enables us to deliver for the people and communities across the county.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Hart". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Hart

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