

HEART OF THE SOUTH WEST JOINT COMMITTEE – PROPOSAL TO WITHDRAW

Council - 20 November 2023



1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Heart of the South West Joint Committee (HotSW JC) was formed in March 2018. The Joint Committee was created to replace a less formal partnership arrangement, providing a single forum for local authority engagement with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (HotSW LEP) and Government.
- 1.2. The HotSW JC is a Joint Committee of the local authorities listed in 1.3 below that comprise the HotSW area and was established under Sections 101 to 103 of the Local Government Act 1972 and all other enabling legislation.
- 1.3. The current Joint Committee members include Devon County Council and Devon Districts, Exeter City Council, Plymouth City Council, Somerset Council and Dartmoor and Exmoor National Park Authorities. The HotSW Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the NHS are co-opted members.
- 1.4. The specific objectives of the HotSW Joint Committee are to:
 - Improve the economy and the prospects for the region by bringing together the public, private and education sectors.
 - Increase the understanding of the economy and what needs to be done to make it stronger.
 - Improve the efficiency and productivity of the public sector.
 - Identify and remove barriers to progress and maximise the opportunities / benefits available to the area from current and future government policy.
- 1.5. The establishment of the Joint Committee in 2018 coincided with the publication and adoption of the HotSW Productivity Strategy. Owning and overseeing the delivery of this Strategy was identified as the primary role of the new Joint Committee, working together with the LEP.
- 1.6. The HotSW JC is run and managed via an inter-authority agreement and formal terms of reference. It has a meeting cycle of two formal meetings a year and it is directly supported and administered by Somerset Council.

2. LEP INTEGRATION AND CASE FOR CHANGE

- 2.2 The Spring Budget Announcement in March 2023 included a clear statement from Government that they were “minded” to withdraw the funding provided to LEPs from April 2024. Following a period of consultation, this decision was made final and communicated in a letter to LEP Chairs and Local Authority Leaders on 04 August 2023.
- 2.3 The decision to withdraw funding was made following a review that was undertaken by the Government between early 2021 and the publication of the February 2022 Levelling Up white paper. The Levelling Up white paper set out the proposition that the LEP functions would be folded into a new devolved arrangement – this has been further clarified, and for areas which do not have, or are not pursuing a devolution deal, the LEP functions will be integrated into the relevant upper tier authorities.
- 2.4 This change in Government policy and the move towards greater devolution means that the purpose of the HotSW JC to oversee the delivery of the Productivity Strategy by the LEP has largely been superseded and therefore this function is no longer needed. Other partnership

arrangements have been put in place between the Constituent Authorities to collaborate around regional issues.

- 2.5 A further decision will be taken by Council in due course in relation to the LEP integration plans and the impact for Plymouth City Council as one of the upper tier authorities. Integration Plans are the mechanism set out to support the transition, and within the guidance [provided to LEPs] the scope of functions to be transferred includes economic analysis and evidence base, growth hub, inward investment and trade, local Skills Advisory Panels, Careers Hubs, Digital Skills Partnerships, investment programmes (local growth fund, getting building fund etc.)

3. PROPOSAL TO WITHDRAW

- 3.1 Given the rationale set out in section 2 above, it is proposed that Plymouth City Council serves notice to withdraw as a constituent member of the HotSW JC. In relation to withdrawal from/dissolution of the HotSW JC, the inter-authority agreement that was drawn up as part of the arrangement for the creation of the HotSW JC states that:
- a. A Constituent Authority wishing to withdraw from the Joint Committee shall give a minimum of 6 months' notice in writing to the other Constituent Authority via the Administering Authority. The Constituent Authorities shall co-operate with any such request.
 - b. If two or more Constituent Authorities give notice of withdrawal from membership of the Joint Committee in the same Financial Year, the Joint Committee shall consider and make recommendations to the remaining Constituent Authorities as to the future operation of the Joint Committee and, if appropriate, recommend any necessary amendments required to the Joint Committee's functions and operating arrangements.
 - c. Where a majority of the Constituent Authorities at any time agree (via formal resolutions) that the Joint Committee should be dissolved or terminated on a specified date then the Joint Committee shall cease to exist from that date.
- 3.2 At a meeting of the HotSW LEP held on 27 October 2023, the Constituent Authorities were invited to note the intention of the partners (Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, Torbay Council and Somerset Council) to seek approval to serve notice and propose that the Joint Committee is dissolved.
- 3.3 It is expected that under the terms of the inter-authority agreement 3.1.c above, the proposal to withdraw will be brought forward to the partners and as such, the Constituent Authorities will jointly agree to give notice and propose that the HotSW Joint Committee be dissolved.
- 3.4 The proposition is that the Joint Committee use its meeting scheduled for 26 January 2024 to receive the proposed notices and determine its response. All future meetings from that point would be cancelled.