



North Devon Council

Report Date: Wednesday, 22 November 2023

Topic: Proposed Dissolution of Heart of South West Joint Committee

Report by: Ken Miles, Chief Executive

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report suggests approval for the dissolution of the HoSW Joint Committee (“Joint Committee”) which is currently made up of Somerset Council, Devon County Council, Plymouth Council, Torbay Council, National Parks and the 8 Devon District Councils (“Constituent Authorities”). It follows a steer from the Leaders / senior members of several Constituent Authorities for proposals to be brought forward to all Constituent Authorities to consider their withdrawal and dissolution of the Joint Committee.

1.2 The proposals in this report specifically relate to the Joint Committee’s governance arrangements only and do not cover the HotSW Local Enterprise Partnership or the associated HotSW Joint Scrutiny Committee

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Council agrees to serve notice of its withdrawal and that the Heart of the South West Joint Committee be dissolved on 31 December 2023

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Changes in Government policy over the last five years, the development of the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay devolution deal and forthcoming integration of the HotSW LEP into local authorities mean that the purpose of the HotSW Joint Committee has largely been superseded and other existing partnership arrangements between the Constituent Authorities can deliver their aims. The HotSW Joint Committee is therefore considered to be superfluous and not adding value to the Constituent Authorities

4. REPORT

4.1 In 2015 the HotSW partnership (17 local authorities, two National Parks, the LEP and three clinical commissioning groups) submitted a devolution “statement of intent” to Government and began negotiations about a devolution deal. However, following the EU referendum in 2016, devolution was no longer a government policy priority and the HotSW partnership developed a Productivity Strategy. In March 2018 the partnership formalised the arrangements to establish the HotSW Joint Committee. The Heart of the SW LEP and the NHS are co-opted members of the HotSW Joint Committee.

4.2 The Joint Committee was seen as a partnership vehicle to provide a single forum for local authority engagement with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership and Government.

4.3 The specific objectives of the HotSW Joint Committee in its Terms of Reference are to:

- (a) Improve the economy and the prospects for the region by bringing together the public, private and education sectors;
- (b) Increase our understanding of the economy and what needs to be done to make it stronger;
- (c) Improve the efficiency and productivity of the public sector;
- (d) Identify and remove barriers to progress and maximise the opportunities / benefits available to the area from current and future government policy.

4.4 Since its inception, the Joint Committee's work has focused on issues covering the HotSW area as a whole such as: Local Industrial Strategy, Coastal Productivity Plan, Housing Task Force and regional imbalances.

4.5 The Joint Committee currently has a meeting cycle of two formal meetings a year and it is directly supported by Somerset Council.

4.6 Changes in Government policy over the last five years, the development of the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay devolution deal and forthcoming integration of the HotSW LEP into local authorities mean that the purpose of the Joint Committee has largely been superseded and other partnership arrangements between the Constituent Authorities can deliver their aims with reduced duplication.

4.7 In relation to withdrawal from/dissolution of the Joint Committee, the inter-authority agreement states that:

- *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.*
- *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.*
- *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.

4.8 In December 2022, the scheduled meeting of the Joint Committee was adjourned as it was not quorate due to low attendance by Constituent Authorities. On 27 October 2023, the scheduled meeting of the Joint Committee was also not quorate and was unable to proceed due to only four of the fourteen Constituent Authorities attending the meeting.

It is likely that proposals will be brought forward during November and December 2023 by a majority of the Constituent Authorities for their councils to agree to serve notice and recommend the dissolution of the Joint Committee on 31 December 2023

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Joint Committee remains completely reliant on the Constituent Authorities for its budget and there are no obvious sources of additional funding to support running costs or delivery of its work programme. Joint Committee members' costs and expenses are funded and administered by each respective Constituent Authority.

5.2 The Administering Authority (Somerset Council) holds the balance of contributions from the Constituent Authorities. The current unallocated balance is £ 43,009. If the Joint Committee is dissolved, then any outstanding balance would be returned proportionally to each of the Constituent Authorities on the same percentage basis that they made contributions.

5.3 The key risk is continuing with the Joint Committee and duplicating the work of existing partnership arrangements without adding any value. The recommendations in this report mitigate that risk.

6 EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1 Please detail if there are/are not any equalities implications anticipated as a result of this report. If so, please complete the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Summary form available on Insite and email to the Corporate and Community Services Team at equality@northdevon.gov.uk.



7 ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1 Please undertake an Environmental Assessment and complete the checklist (EAC) form available on Insite. If there are no environmental implications arising from your proposals please state that there are none. If after completion of the assessment there are environmental implications please provide a brief summary. If you require any further information please contact the Sustainability and Climate Change Officer. Email completed EACs to donna.sibley@torridge.gov.uk

8 CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1 As the Joint Committee is no longer supported and isn't attended by Constituent Authorities, there are no implications on corporate priorities.

9 CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1 The decision in respect of the recommendations in this report can be made pursuant to Article 4 of the Constitution.

10 STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11 BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: (The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report).

12 STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: