

Torbay Council representative on the Heart of the South West Joint Committee

Update for the meeting of the Council held on 19 June 2019

- The Heart of the South West Joint Committee was due to hold its AGM on Friday 7 June 2019. However, the local elections (including the retirement of a number of leaders) has had a significant impact on the political composition and membership of the Joint Committee. It was felt that an informal session would help build relationships and bring new members up to speed with the history and achievements of the Joint Committee.
- The session met these aims and it is useful for me to share the history and achievements with the whole of Torbay Council.

History of the Joint Committee

- The Heart of the South West Joint Committee was formally established and ratified by each member Council/Board in March 2018. The partnership has existed since August 2015, when the Devon and Somerset local authorities came together to try and secure a Devolution deal with Government.
- Since that time, it has shifted its focus to develop a stronger, strategic voice for this part of the South-West with a focus on partnership working to deliver socio-economic improvement, and build a collaborative relationship with the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.
- By working in this way, the Partnership has gained the attention of Government, MPs and Whitehall and has developed a reputation as a solid and collaborative set of partners representing the collective interests of Devon and Somerset. In uncertain times the Joint Committee has continued to drive a strategic approach looking to the future prospects and opportunities.
- The vision for the partnership is to deliver prosperity for all through increased productivity. This is articulated through the joint Productivity Strategy and Delivery Plan.
- The focus has now shifted to moving at pace, and get ahead of the pack, and develop our Local Industrial Strategy with dual-key sign off with the Local Enterprise Partnership. As we know the Local Enterprise Partnership is responsible for the development of the Local Industrial Strategy and does not have to obtain the sign off of the local authorities – other than those members of its Board – however, the Local Enterprise Partnership is keen to continue the joint working relationship with all local authorities.

Governance

- The Joint Committee has 21 members – the Leaders from each County, Unitary and District Council across Devon and Somerset plus representatives from each National Park Authority, the two Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- The purpose of the Joint Committee is to add value to the work of the Constituent Authorities through strategic decision making and engagement with Government and MPs. There are two Key Principles:
 - Protect the sovereignty and functions of Constituent Authorities
 - Subsidiarity – decisions to deliver the Productivity Strategy taken at most appropriate local level
- All Constituent Authorities have formally adopted a constitutional document detailing the functions of the Joint Committee and an Inter-authority Agreement which details how committee is supported and funded. To minimise the costs, the majority of officer resource is provided on an ‘in-kind’ basis.

Achievements

- A stronger voice with Government and Whitehall without the cost and structure of a Mayoral Combined Authority
- **Single Strategy:** One of 6 ‘wave 2’ areas selected to work with government on our Local Industrial Strategy; successful joint development and sign off of our own Productivity Strategy and Delivery Plan
- **Skills:** One of 12 areas to secure funding for an Institute of Technology – a collaboration between our colleges, universities and major businesses; £225K for the Digital Skills Partnership to deliver ‘Digital Momentum’; £75k to help set up a Skills Advisory Panel with businesses and providers
- **Brexit:** Ongoing conversations with senior Whitehall officials for closer working arrangements regarding Brexit preparations and post-exit support; opportunities around infrastructure, fisheries, agriculture, town centre development, devolution of powers and funding
- **Housing:** Over £200m of Housing Infrastructure Fund money secured to unlock sites and provide essential infrastructure; successful HotSW Housing Summit and establishment of a Housing Task Force involving Homes England
- **Transport:** Significant funding secured for major new road schemes (North Devon Link road, Forder Valley, Junction 25 of the M5) plus work commenced on new sea wall at Dawlish to protect rail services; active support for the establishment of the new Peninsula Transport body.

- **Innovation:** Funding for our universities through successful Strength in Places bids; active involvement in several 'Sector Deals' with government

Future Work Programme

- **Climate Change Emergency** – bringing together activity across Devon and Somerset Councils to push forward a Carbon Plan for the area to input into Government's Comprehensive Spending Review.
- **Attracting Government funding** – making the case for a fairer distribution of economic funding for Devon and Somerset and a share of new funding streams for socio-economic budgets such as UK Shared Prosperity Fund and other EU replacement funds.
- **Stronger Places (including Coastal Communities)** – establishing a Task Group to develop a prospectus to Government with Devon and Somerset proposals for regeneration of key places across market towns and coastal communities with a focus on vulnerable communities and businesses.
- **EU Exit** – Continuing cross-council work to draw down powers and funding to a local level to adapt/transition to whatever outcome of the EU Exit negotiations based on local lessons learnt and issues identified by our communities and businesses during recent preparations for No Deal exit.
- **Delivering the Productivity Strategy** – overseeing the delivery of the Productivity Strategy through a Delivery Plan to deliver our vision for a prosperous economy.
- **Local Industrial Strategy** – As Leaders will know the Government has made the LEP responsible for developing a LIS but, through the Joint Committee, Devon and Somerset political leaders, have the opportunity to influence and engage the LEP to reflect their aspirations. It is important that we stay ahead of other areas in the race to develop a strategy if we are not to be left behind by the focus on the south-east and the North.
- **'Great South West'** – influencing the work of the Great South West, now supported by an All Party Parliamentary Group of MPs, looking at improved outcomes for rural areas across the SW Peninsula - Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset. This APPG has support from Jake Berry MP – Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at MHCLG, who is offering to support proposals through the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- **Public sector reform** - working together to deliver key public sector reforms for the benefit of Devon and Somerset communities. Examples include Education and Health.