

Report to: Cabinet



Date of Meeting 14 July 2021

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Joint Strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid-Devon and Teignbridge

Report summary:

This report seeks formal agreement of the scope, resourcing, timetable and governance arrangements for preparing a non-statutory Joint Strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge Councils.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

That Cabinet recommends that Council:

1. Approve the scope of the joint strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge as set out in section 2 of the report;
2. Approve the proposed resourcing of the plan as per option 5 in the report;
3. Approve the timetable for production of the plan as detailed in paragraph 4.1 of the report and;
4. Approve the proposed governance arrangements set out in appendix b of the report.

Reason for recommendation:

Following the change of approach to joint plan making with the authorities within the Greater Exeter area a non-statutory Joint Strategy covering strategy and infrastructure matters is considered to be the most appropriate way of ensuring a collaborative and co-ordinated approach to meeting development needs across the sub-region. The scope, resourcing, timetable and governance arrangements proposed in this report are considered to offer the most appropriate way to deliver a Joint Strategy in a timely manner.

Officer: Ed Freeman – Service Lead – Planning Strategy and Development Management

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergencies
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Culture, Tourism, Leisure and Sport
- Democracy and Transparency
- Economy and Assets
- Finance

- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

As the detailed content of the Joint Strategy is still to be determined, the equalities impacts of the recommendation on people with protected characteristics as determined by the Act are assessed at this stage as neutral. An impact assessment of the Joint Strategy will be undertaken when it is brought to Executive and Full Council for approval at draft stage.

Climate change Low Impact

Climate change mitigation and adaptation should form a key part of joint planning work. By its nature, climate change cannot be addressed by one authority working in isolation. Measures to tackle climate change also need to acknowledge cross-boundary transport movements and other strategic matters. The arrangements proposed in this report will enable the Joint Strategy to be prepared in a timely manner, providing an opportunity to adopt at the earliest opportunity a non-statutory plan that supports the emerging Devon Carbon Plan and considers the carbon emissions and climate change impacts of development and transport over a wider area than just Exeter. Because of this, the Joint Strategy is likely to be more beneficial to climate change policy compared with seeking to achieve carbon neutrality in just one district, albeit that the implications will depend to an extent upon the specific joint planning strategy that is chosen.

Risk: Low Risk; The Joint Strategy will be jointly prepared by four authorities, with support from Devon County Council. This means that Committee decision will be required from the four authorities at similar times to enable milestones to be reached. There is a risk that one or more of the authorities does not approve the Joint Strategy, in either its draft or final form. To help avoid this eventuality, the proposed governance arrangements set out in this report will help to ensure that members from each authority are given significant opportunities to shape the plan as it is prepared.

Links to background information

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- Outstanding Place and Environment
- Outstanding Homes and Communities
- Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
- Outstanding Council and Council Services

Report in full

- 1.1 On 20th October 2020, Strategic Planning Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet that the Council agree in principle to prepare a joint non-statutory plan for the Greater Exeter area in partnership with East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils and with the support of Devon County Council. This recommendation was then agreed by Cabinet at their meeting of the 25th November 2020. The joint plan (hereafter referred to as the Joint Strategy) will include joint strategy and infrastructure planning matters and will be prepared in place of the statutory Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP), on which all of the authorities were working in partnership until the end of 2020. The same resolution was made by the relevant committees of each partner authority during December 2020 / January 2021.

- 1.2 The reasons for recommending the preparation of the Joint Strategy in place of the GESp are set out in full in the 20th October report and are not reiterated in detail here. In summary, in place of the statutory GESp, a non-statutory Joint Strategy covering strategy and infrastructure matters:
- is considered to be the most effective way of addressing the shared and inter-linked planning concerns that affecting the four authorities;
 - will help to fulfil legal Duty to Cooperate requirements, thereby assisting with the preparation of each authority's Local Plan;
 - will demonstrate continued joint-working by the authorities on planning matters, which is vital to help lever in funding to the area to support delivery, particularly for critical strategic infrastructure;
 - will help to establish a recognisable 'brand' for the area, which may assist when making bids for Government (or other) infrastructure and delivery funding; and
 - will enable the local authorities to continue to share expertise and jointly commission relevant evidence to support their Local Plans, with potential cost saving and consistency benefits.
- 1.3 The 20th October report advised that proposals for the Joint Strategy's scope, resourcing, timetable and governance would be brought to Members at a later date. This report seeks Members agreement of those details, which have been directed by discussions with Leaders and relevant Portfolio Holders / Executive members, together with the Chief Executives and/or relevant Directors of the four local authorities and representatives from Homes England and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The relevant committees of Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge District Councils have, or will shortly be, considering the same recommendations, with the aim of achieving an agreed approach to joint planning in the sub-region.
- 1.4 A version of this report was considered by Strategic Planning Committee at their meeting of the 22nd June 2021 and the proposals contained herein were agreed to be recommended to Cabinet provided the joint strategy was produced on the basis that each partner authority meets its own housing needs.

2. Scope of the Joint Strategy

- 2.1 In order to achieve the benefits of preparing the Joint Strategy set out in paragraph 1.2 above, and as further directed by the discussions referred to in paragraph 1.3 above, the proposed scope of the Joint Strategy is to:
- provide an opportunity for the authorities to jointly identify a clear, ambitious future for the area;
 - demonstrate a commitment to joint working on strategic matters;
 - distil the key strategic issues facing the area, to enable each of the authorities' Local Plans to respond in a way that reflects local conditions and support joint evidence preparation where appropriate;

- act as a prospectus to lever-in external funding to overcome strategic issues and unlock development;
- Be a non-statutory-living document which can be easily kept up to date to reflect evolving priorities and local conditions.

2.2 As regards to bullet points two and three, the Joint Strategy will not be a statutory plan and therefore will not set the planning policies of the four authorities. This will be the role of Local Plans. Instead, the Joint Strategy will provide an overarching framework that allows strategic planning and delivery matters to be considered collaboratively.

2.3 As regards the final bullet point above, it is proposed that the Joint Strategy should not be a one-off document. Instead it can be updated over time and as necessary to reflect the content of Local Plans as they are adopted, or new strategic infrastructure priorities and projects emerge.

3. Resourcing

3.1 The Leaders have considered the following range of options for resourcing progress on the Joint Strategy:

- Divide the work equally between officers from the four authorities;
- Re-establish a dedicated team of officers from available resources within the authorities;
- Externally recruit a Project Manager to lead the project and work alongside a group of officers from the authorities (who would provide support in a limited time capacity);
- Complete an initial draft of the Joint Strategy in-house, then engage a consultant to progress the work on behalf of the authorities, supported in a limited capacity by a group of officers;
- Engage a consultant to prepare the Joint Strategy on behalf of the authorities, supported in a limited capacity by a group of officers.

3.2 Appendix A provides some high-level commentary on the pros and cons of the five resourcing options.

3.3 In considering the options, Leaders have been clear that the Joint Strategy should be prepared promptly, so that its aforementioned benefits can be realised as soon as possible. At the same time, following the change of approach following GESP, the four local planning authorities are prioritising work on their individual statutory Local Plans. Collectively, the authorities do not have the in-house resources available to prepare the Joint Strategy alongside Local Plans.

- 3.4 For these reasons, it is proposed to engage a consultant to prepare the Joint Strategy on behalf of the authorities (option 5). In doing so, the consultant will be expected to make use of the considerable body of joint planning evidence that was prepared for the GESP. Details of how the consultant's work will be managed are provided in paragraph 5.1 and 5.2 below. The consultant will be required to demonstrate the skills and knowledge needed to ensure the effectiveness of the Joint Strategy as a significant proposition to the Government and be able to present and undertake consultation on the Joint Strategy in creative ways.
- 3.5 Sufficient funds are available in the GESP budget to cover the proposed approach to resourcing.

4. Timetable

4.1 The proposed timetable for preparing the first version of the Joint Strategy is as follows:

- Jun-Jul 2021: Formal agreement by relevant authority committees of scope, timetable, resourcing and governance of the Joint Strategy
- Jul-Aug 2021: Engage a consultant to prepare the Joint Strategy
- Sept-Dec 2021: Review previous joint planning work and prepare the draft Joint Strategy
- Jan-Feb 2022: Undertake Member and stakeholder engagement
- Mar-Apr 2022: Finalise draft Joint Strategy
- May-June 2022: Seek formal agreement from relevant authority committees of the draft Joint Strategy
- Jul-Aug 2022: Publicly consult on the draft Joint Strategy
- Aug-Sept 2022: Finalise the Joint Strategy
- Sept-Oct 2022: Seek formal agreement from relevant authority committees to adopt the Joint Strategy

4.2 The proposed timetable to achieve adoption of the first version of the Joint Strategy is reasonably swift, in order that the benefits set out in paragraph 1.2 of this report can be realised as soon as possible. The Strategy will not be a statutory planning document and therefore will not be subject to the same statutory requirements for stages of public consultation and Examination as a Local Plan. This means that it can be prepared more speedily than a Local Plan. However, given the proposed scope of the Joint Strategy, it is important that members, stakeholders and local communities are given an opportunity to have their say on the content of the document. Time for such consultation is therefore included in the proposed timetable.

4.3 There are sufficient funds available in the GESP budget to take the Joint Strategy through the stages set out in the timetable, including public consultation.

- 4.4 Since the Joint Strategy will not be a statutory document, Members should note that the proposed timetable is not a Local Development Scheme and may therefore be subject to change. However, there is a clear intention to adopt the Joint Strategy no later than October 2022.
- 4.5 The stages of preparation needed for any future iterations of the Joint Strategy will depend upon the nature of revisions to the document. It should not be necessary to publically consult on revisions that arise from the adoption of Local Plans, as these will already have been subject to statutory public consultation through the Local Plan adoption process.

5. Governance

- 5.1 The diagram at appendix B summarises the proposed governance structure for the Joint Strategy.
- 5.2 In summary, the proposed governance arrangements will see the Joint Strategy prepared by a Project Lead (the appointed consultant), supported in a limited capacity by a small working group of experienced planning and/or delivery officers from each of the authorities. The work of the Project Lead will be managed by a Project Assurance Group (PAG) comprising the planning or delivery leads from each authority. PAG will in turn report to a Principals group comprising the Chief Executives or Directors from each authority and representatives from Homes England and the LEP acting in an advisory capacity. The involvement of Homes England and the LEP in the Principals group is vitally important in respect of a key role of the Joint Strategy – i.e. its use as a prospectus to help lever-in funding to support development delivery.
- 5.3 As set out in paragraph 4.1, the timetable includes member consultation on the draft Joint Strategy in January and February 2022. The nature of this consultation is yet to be determined. Political direction on the Joint Strategy will be provided by the Leaders and relevant Portfolio Holders of the authorities. Final decision-making powers to agree the draft and final versions of the Joint Strategy will rest with the relevant committees of the four local planning authorities.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 This report sets out the proposed scope, resourcing, timetable and governance arrangements for preparing a Joint Strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge. The proposed arrangements are considered to offer the most appropriate means to deliver a non-statutory Joint Strategy in a timely manner, thereby helping to demonstrate and ensure continued successful joint planning across the sub-region.

Financial implications:

Budgetary implications and available funds within the existing GESP budget are discussed within the body of the report.

Legal implications:

As the Joint Strategy is not being adopted as a Development Plan Document (DPD) or Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) it cannot set planning policies for development within the District. The East Devon Local Plan remains the primary planning policy for the District. There are no other legal implications other than those within the report and document.

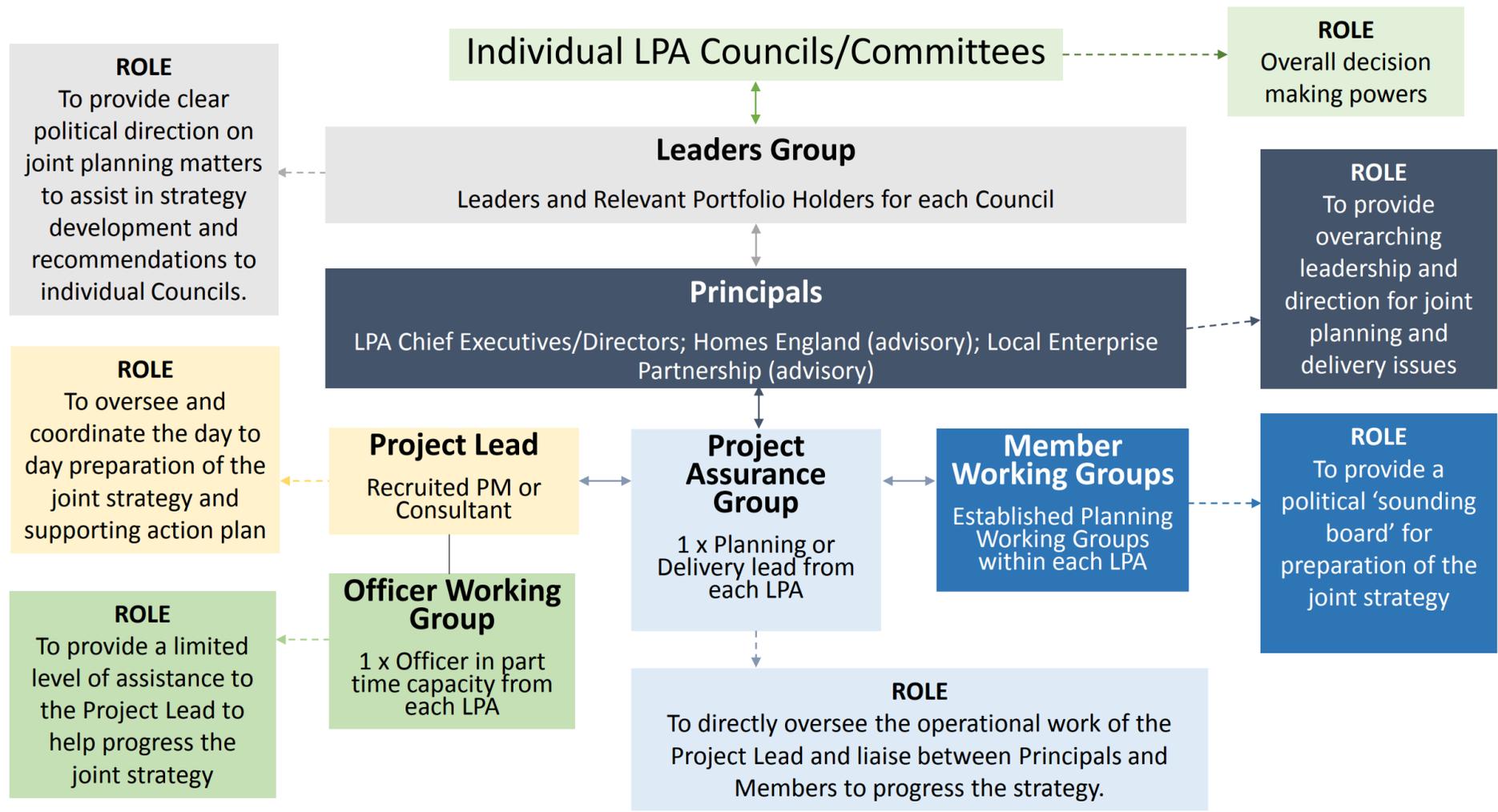
Appendix A

Assessment of options to resource the Joint Strategy

Option	Pros	Cons
<p>1. Work on the joint strategy is split equally between the 4 authorities</p>	<p>The joint strategy will start to be prepared within the shortest timeframe possible.</p> <p>Officers preparing the Joint Strategy will have the benefit of local knowledge, previous involvement in GESP and close ties with the evidence, stakeholders and Members.</p> <p>No additional cost.</p>	<p>No overall lead officer is in place to project manage the work, ensure consistency, etc.</p> <p>Due to timescales and approach to resourcing, there will be limited opportunity to explore different ways to present the Joint Strategy. It's therefore likely that the document would be prepared in a chapter format, similar to the GESP. It will require some authorities to pause work on their Local Plan for at least two months in order to resource the work.</p> <p>There is potential for major editorial/stylistic differences between the different sections, as they will be prepared by different authorities.</p>
<p>2. Re-establish a dedicated team of officers from available resources.</p>	<p>Officers preparing the Joint Strategy will have the benefit of local knowledge, previous involvement in GESP, and close ties with the evidence, stakeholders and Members.</p> <p>An overall lead will be appointed to project manage the work, ensure consistency, etc.</p> <p>There will be potential to explore different/creative ways of presenting the Joint Strategy.</p> <p>No additional costs unless recruitment is required.</p>	<p>Will require the redistribution of resources within existing teams and the reprioritisation of workload/review of Local Plan timetables. This is likely to result in delays to Local Plan preparation unless additional resource is brought in.</p> <p>Could take at least a couple of months to organise the redistribution of resources and amend Local Plan timetables, and/or externally recruit additional resource.</p>
<p>3. Externally recruit a Project Manager to lead the project and work alongside a group of officers from the authorities</p>	<p>A dedicated lead officer will project manage the work, ensure consistency, etc.</p> <p>The supporting group of officers will have the benefit of local knowledge, previous involvement in GESP, and</p>	<p>Will create an additional resource cost, although funds are available in the GESP budget, The PM will need to initially be employed on a fixed term 1 year contract, but this might need to be extended if work is not completed within this timeframe.</p>

<p>(who would provide support in a part time capacity)</p>	<p>close ties with the evidence, stakeholders and Members. There will be potential to explore different/creative ways of presenting the information</p>	<p>Will take several months to go through the process of job evaluation for a new post and recruitment. Still likely to require a reasonable level of resource from Local Plan teams to support the work, with potential knock-on effects for Local Plan preparation.</p>
<p>4. Completed an initial draft in-house, then engage a consultant to progress the work on behalf of the authorities, supported in a limited capacity by a group of officers</p>	<p>The supporting group of officers will have the benefit of local knowledge, previous involvement in GESP and close ties with the evidence, stakeholders and Members. The consultant could coordinate consultation, which is resource intensive.</p>	<p>Will create an additional resource cost, although funds are available in the GESP budget (Planning Delivery Fund). Will take a couple of months to go through competitive tender recruitment process – but could be done alongside a draft being prepared. There is potential for confused project management between the early and latter stages. Also, there is no dedicated project manager in place in the early stages (see options 1 and 2). There is potential for conflict between the initial draft and final versions, due to different people working on the Joint Strategy. Use of officer time in preparing the first draft will result in delays to Local Plan preparation. Consultants may not have the benefit of local knowledge, and will not have previous involvement in GESP or close ties with the evidence, stakeholders and Members. This can be managed to a large degree by ensuring that all Member-facing work is undertaken by officers and that PAG carefully steer the work of the consultant.</p>
<p>5. Engage a consultant to prepare the Joint Strategy on behalf of the authorities, supported in a limited capacity by a group of officers</p>	<p>There will be a dedicated project management to oversee the work. A consultant is likely to have additional skills and knowledge to improve the effectiveness of the Joint Strategy as a significant national proposition to government. It offers the potential to explore different/creative ways of presenting the Joint Strategy. Having a small group of officers supporting in a limited capacity should not affect Local Plan preparation.</p>	<p>Will create an additional cost resource, although funds available within the GESP budget (Planning Delivery Fund). Will take a couple of months to go through competitive tender recruitment process. Consultants may not have the benefit of local knowledge, previous involvement in GESP, and close ties with the evidence, stakeholders and Members. This could be managed to a large degree by ensuring that all Member-facing work is undertaken by officers and that PAG carefully steer the work of the consultant.</p>

Appendix B: Governance Arrangements Diagram



Governance for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge Joint Planning Matters

Leaders Group

Who?

Leaders and Relevant Portfolio Holders for each Council

Role

To provide clear political direction on joint planning matters to assist in strategy development and recommendations to individual Councils.

Key responsibilities

- Provide political leadership, governance and direction for decision making;
- Actively work with nominated Leaders of the other authorities to deliver an agreed approach to joint planning matters;
- Ensure full engagement of elected members for their authority in joint planning matters.

Principals

Who?

LPA Chief Executives/Directors; Homes England; Local Enterprise Partnership

Role

To provide overarching leadership and direction for joint planning and delivery issues

Key responsibilities

- Advise and agree at a strategic level on priorities and risks associated with joint planning matters;
- Have overall accountability for joint planning work;
- Ensure that adequate resources are available and provide direction between conflicting work priorities
- Review status reports.

Project Assurance Group

Who?

1 x Planning or Delivery lead from each LPA

Role

To directly oversee the operational work of the Project Lead and liaise between Principals and Members to progress the strategy.

Key responsibilities

- Ensure work is implemented to agreed timelines and deliverables;
- Anticipate and manage business related issues that may affect work progress;
- Manage budget;
- Manage procurement of evidence as required;
- Manage resources.

Project Lead

Who?

Recruited Project Manager or Consultant

Role

To oversee and coordinate the day to day preparation of the joint strategy and supporting action plan

Key responsibilities

- Project management of the production of the joint strategy;
- Reporting to the Project Assurance Group and other governance groups as required on progress;
- Liaison with external partners where required;
- Reporting to relevant Member Working Groups of the 4 Councils as required on progress achieved;
- Co-ordination of external communications in association with public consultation.

Officer Working Group

Who?

1 x Officer in part time capacity from each LPA

Role

To provide a limited level of assistance to the Project Lead to help progress the joint strategy

Key responsibilities

- Supply Project lead with relevant evidence and information;
- Undertake data collation exercises;
- Assist in consultation arrangements and liaison with communications teams.

Member Working Groups

Who?

Established Planning Working Groups within each LPA

Role

To provide a political 'sounding board' for joint planning and delivery issues

Key responsibilities

- Provide local context, political advice and guidance on planning matters being progressed through joint planning channels;
- Provide views on proposed consultation and engagement arrangements.