

Report to: Council



Date of Meeting 6th December 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Proposed Dissolution of the Heart of the South West Joint Committee

Report summary:

This report suggests approval for the dissolution of the HotSW 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.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes No

Policy Framework Yes No

Recommendation:

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

Reason for recommendation:

Changes in government policy over the last five years, the development of the Devon 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integration of the HotSW LEP into local authorities mean that the purpose of the HotSW Joint Committee has largely been superseded and other existing partnership arrangements between the Constituent Authorities can deliver their aims.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

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- Climate Action and Emergency Response
- Coast, Country and Environment
- Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- Communications and Democracy
- Economy
- Finance and Assets
- Strategic Planning
- Sustainable Homes and Communities
- Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

If choosing High or Medium level outline the equality considerations here, which should include any particular adverse impact on people with protected characteristics and actions to mitigate these. Link to an equalities impact assessment form using the [equalities form template](#).

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; Click here to enter text on risk considerations relating to your report.

Links to background information Click here to enter links to background information; appendices online; and previous reports. These must link to an electronic document. Do not include any confidential or exempt information.

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

Introduction

1.1 This report suggests approval for the dissolution of the HotSW 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.

Background

2.1 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.

2.2 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.

2.3 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.

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

2.5 Changes in Government policy over the last five years, the development of the Devon 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.

Dissolution

4.1 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.

4.2 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

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 recommendation in this report mitigates that risk.

Conclusion

6.1 The HotSW Joint Committee has become an anachronism. The recommendation to serve notice to withdraw is being replicated across other Devon Districts. A further report will be forthcoming to Cabinet on the proposed devolution deal for Devon and Torbay.

Financial implications:

To be completed by Finance.

Legal implications:

To be completed by Legal.