

Press Release

PR 9603

26 January 2016

For Immediate Release

Devon and Somerset bid for more powers to boost prosperity

Council chiefs and business leaders say they want a 'devolution revolution' to boost prosperity in Devon and Somerset.

They have agreed to submit a prospectus to Government that would result in higher productivity and better-paid jobs, improved road, rail and broadband links and more homes for the region's growing population.

There would be radical reforms to integrate health and social care to allow the ageing population to be better looked after, tailored support for growing businesses and the creation of a centre of excellence for skills development.

The bid follows months of concentrated work by council chiefs in Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay with 13 district councils, Dartmoor and Exmoor national parks, the local NHS and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

They want more powers and finance devolved from Westminster to the region so they can close the productivity gap and allow local people to benefit from a thriving economy.

Currently productivity in the South West is running at less than 80 per cent of the national average.

But the document promises that, if local councils have greater freedom to act, by 2030 they will help deliver:

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- £4 billion uplift to the economy
- 163,000 new jobs
- 179,000 more homes
- Higher wage levels which are above the national average
- Apprenticeship starts up by 400 per cent
- Every young person in education, employment or training
- A better qualified workforce
- Faster, more reliable rail services with greater capacity
- Faster road journeys with less congestion
- 100 per cent superfast broadband coverage
- A UK centre of excellence for skills development

This is more growth than the three core cities of Birmingham, Bristol and Nottingham have delivered in total, together, over the last fifteen years.

The bid points out that the South West already has world-beating expertise in a number of significant areas such as knowledge-based skills in Exeter, marine industries in Plymouth, nuclear technology at Hinkley Point and aerospace in Yeovil as well as its traditional industries like agriculture, fishing and tourism.

Somerset County Council leader John Osman said: “This is a truly exciting opportunity for all the local authorities involved in this work. We have come together with the common aim of making the most of devolution for our residents and shared priorities around skills, employment and infrastructure.

“The bid reflects our pride in what the region has to offer and our ambitions for its future potential. I look forward to taking the next steps with colleagues from across the South West.”

Plymouth City Council leader Tudor Evans said: “We lag behind the rest of the country in terms of productivity and need to act now to improve the opportunities for our young people, so that they have the right skills to get good high value jobs and grow their careers in this region, helping us all to become more prosperous. We also want to see more local people employed in some of the major opportunities

coming our way.

“We are making the Government an offer they can’t refuse.”

Devon County Council leader John Hart said: “We are presenting a united front to the Government and saying this is our vision for our region, let’s negotiate on how you can help us to achieve it.

“I firmly believe, as local people, we can do things more effectively and more efficiently locally than being told what to do by London.

“This is the first time in my political lifetime that the Government has offered local government the opportunity to draw down powers like these.

“This could mean real power coming to the South West. This is a real opportunity for this council and other councils and we would be foolish not to seize it.

“We should be working together for the benefit of the people of Devon and the South West.”

Steve Hindley, Chair of the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership, said: “Businesses across the Heart of the South West are the driving force that will deliver transformational growth and are keen to be at the helm of a prospective devolution deal alongside local authority partners.

“We look forward to working with Government and investors as we embark on this journey towards prosperity and increased productivity, that will benefit not only the Heart of the South West but the UK economy as a whole.”

Ends

Notes for Editors:

The Heart of the South West devolution partners are:

- Heart of the South West LEP
- Somerset County Council
- Somerset's district and borough councils: Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Taunton Deane and West Somerset
- Devon County Council
- Devon's district and borough councils: East Devon, Mid Devon, North Devon, South Hams, Teignbridge, Torridge and West Devon
- Plymouth City Council
- Exeter City Council
- Torbay Council
- Exmoor National Park
- Dartmoor National Park
- Northern, Eastern and Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group
- Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group
- South Devon and Torbay Clinical Commissioning Group

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Collateral

- prospectus for devolution [prospectus for devolution](#)