

**Teignbridge District Council
Executive Committee
16 September 2021
Part I**

Report Title

East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge Joint Strategy: scope, resourcing timetable and governance

Purpose of Report

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.

Recommendation

That the Committee RECOMMENDS that Council support the scope, resourcing, indicative timetable and governance arrangements set out in Section 1 of this report to Executive for preparing a non-statutory Joint Strategy for East Devon, Exeter, Mid Devon and Teignbridge Councils.

Financial Implications

Financial implications are addressed at Section 2.4 of this report and it is confirmed that existing resources are available within the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan budget. Chief Finance Officer and Head of Corporate Services
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Legal Implications

Advice has been provided on the report. No direct legal implications.
Karen Trickey, Monitoring Officer

Risk Assessment

Risks are addressed at Section 2 of this report
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Environmental/Climate Change Implications

Environmental and climate change implications are addressed at Section 2 of this report
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Executive Member

Executive Member for Planning
Cllr Gary Taylor

Appendices/Background Papers

Appendix A – Assessment of Options

Appendix B – Governance Proposals

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the demise of the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP), 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.
- 1.2 On 14 January 2021, Full Council resolved in principle to prepare a joint non-statutory plan for the Greater Exeter area in partnership with East Devon, Mid Devon and Exeter City Councils and with the support of Devon County Council. 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 authority during December 2020 / January 2021.
- 1.3 The reasons for recommending the preparation of the Joint Strategy in place of the GESP are set out in full in the 14 January 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.

1.4 The 14 January report advised that proposals for the Joint Strategy's scope, resourcing, timetable and governance would be brought to Full Council at the earliest opportunity. This report seeks Full Council's 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 Home England and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The relevant committees of East Devon, Mid Devon and Exeter City 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.

1.5 Executive is asked to approve early stages of evidence gathering for the Joint Strategy ahead of a Full Council decision on whether to continue towards stakeholder engagement and public consultation. It is expected that the Council decision will be made in September 2021.

Scope of the Joint Strategy

1.6 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.

1.7 As regards 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.

Resourcing

1.8 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.

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

1.10 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 demise of the 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.

1.11 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 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.

Timetable

1.12 The indicative timetable for preparing the first version of the Joint Strategy is as follows:

- Jun – Sep 2021: Formal agreement by relevant authority committees of scope, timetable, resourcing and governance of the Joint Strategy
- Sep – Oct 2021: Engage a consultant to prepare the Joint Strategy

- Oct – Feb 2022: Review previous joint planning work and prepare the draft Joint Strategy
- Feb – May 2022: Undertake Member and stakeholder engagement
- Jun – Jul 2022: Finalise draft Joint Strategy
- Jul – Sep 2022: Seek formal agreement from relevant authority committees of the draft Joint Strategy
- Oct – Nov 2022: Publicly consult on the draft Joint Strategy
- Nov – Jan 2023: Finalise the Joint Strategy
- Jan – Feb 2023: Seek formal agreement from relevant authority committees to adopt the Joint Strategy

1.13 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 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.

1.14 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.

1.15 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 early 2023.

1.16 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

Governance

1.17 The diagram at appendix B summarises the proposed governance structure for the Joint Strategy.

1.18 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, brokerage and support, and facilitate development delivery.

1.19 The proposed timetable includes member consultation on the draft Joint Strategy in Spring 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.

2. Implications, Risk Management and Climate Change Impact

2.1 Agreement of the proposed scope, timetable, resourcing and governance arrangements for the Joint Strategy will enable the document to be progressed in a timely manner. The Joint Strategy will provide a co-ordinated response to the sub-region's strategic economic, climate, housing, environmental and infrastructure issues and help to secure central government investment. The recommended decision will therefore support the delivery of three council priorities of homes, jobs and the environment.

2.2 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.

Environmental/Climate Change Impact

2.3 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 Teignbridge. 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.

Financial

- 2.4 It is anticipated that the consultancy work proposed could cost up to £100,000, although it is hoped that this figure will be considerably less. Sufficient funds are available in the GESP budget to cover the proposed approach to resourcing.

3. Alternative Options

- 3.1 The Joint Strategy could be prepared with an alternative scope and different timetable, resourcing and governance arrangements from those set out in this report. However, in each case, the proposals are considered to offer the best option for demonstrating and delivering a shared approach to strategic planning matters such as economic and housing development, carbon reduction, digital connectivity, infrastructure delivery and habitats mitigation across the sub-region, whilst enabling each local planning authority to retain control over the scope and timetable of statutory Local Plans.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 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.