

Heart of SW LEP Board meeting

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Report title: GSW Update

Report theme: Board

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Purpose of the report

To provide an update on the revised focus to the development of Great South West, highlight the emerging set of next steps which are becoming the focus of the initiative and look for volunteers to come forward for future governance.

Recommendations

1. To provide guidance on what should be the focus for GSW from our perspective
2. To ask for volunteers to attend the next Leaders Forum

Background

The SW Growth Summit last month gave a strong degree of support for regional working with over 350 delegates from all parts of the region and all sectors, including public, private and education sectors. There was a strong message of support for regional working from Sajid Javid – this can be viewed at this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne29bk2cbiM>

Since the Summit I have had some feedback and I am arranging further meetings with partners to gauge their views. In addition there have been two meetings relevant to this agenda:

SW Councils

Earlier this month Local Authorities also met together at a South West Councils meeting and considered what had happened at the Summit; a short paper was presented and there was a debate whether Great South West (GSW) should be supported.

We have been advised that the main threads were as follows:

- The authorities liked the brand.... “even those from the West of England”. Though another attendee had quite a different perception!
- The general view was that the agendas of the SW region is essentially split into two; with the northern authorities feeling they were different from the south. There may

be a small number of issues on which the whole region can unite and it was felt that SW Councils can also provide a forum for facilitating that.

- In terms of GSW this was seen as mainly a Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset initiative although there may be scope to work with other parts of the region under the GSW banner as appropriate on individual issues.

We have seen the draft minutes which confirmed that members generally supported a number of key points:

- (i) The important ongoing role of SW Councils on a broad agenda supporting authorities where appropriate in line with the agreed Business Plan;
- (ii) Support for the concept of the Great South West initiative to promote common SW propositions where this added value, with individual authorities and groups of authorities engaging with the Great South West as it suited them but recognising the separate nature of SW Councils not signing up to the initiative collectively through that body;
- (iii) the Chair of SW Councils to continue to pursue a potential joint meeting with SW Councils Leaders and South West MPs as a collective;
- (iv) Officers of SW Councils to continue to hold a watching brief and bring reports to meetings of SW Councils but not being tasked with signing up collectively to the initiative which was for individual authorities.

SW LEPs Chairs and CEX meeting

All 6 LEPs in the South West met this week; with the addition of Solent LEP who have asked to join our grouping. A full and frank exchange of views was held and again the northern LEPs in the SW felt they had different agendas from the three LEPs in the south and therefore did not want to use a common brand. That said the LEPs did agree that there were a number of agendas on which all six LEPs (7 inc Solent) might wish to collaborate on. In particular common interests were established on an Energy Hub for the SW and exploring opportunities on Life Sciences in addition to existing activity around rural, nuclear, marine and Aerospace.

Next steps

Given this feedback the three LEPs for Dorset, Cornwall and HotSW within Great South West are now focusing on identifying how we can promote further collaborative working and steps and further activities that might benefit our region; including neighbouring LEPs where this is appropriate. A number of initial ideas are under discussion. We will also be meeting with the Chair of SW Councils to discuss these shortly and ideas from LEP Board members are actively sought.

There remain anxieties and a reluctance to work to the common brand of Great South West but some enthusiasm to collaborate where common agendas exist.

Ofcourse other LEPs and Local Authorities will be welcome to join together with Great South West to promote and take forward any specific propositions within the broader portfolio where this is seen as being of common interest. But it seems more likely that a flexible naming approach to initiatives will be utilised; with most branded South West rather than Great South West.

The next 12 months needs to demonstrate a clear step forward in the initiative and its recognition by Government and by regional stakeholders. Directors views are sought on the initial ideas under discussion which include:

- Establishing a SW Rural taskforce to take forward the Rural Commission conclusions
- A regional Skills Advisory Panel Pilot
- A regional MOU with Innovate UK
- A regional trade mission
- A regional delegation to MIPIM
- Taking the SW Summit commercial propositions to Whitehall

It has now been suggested that Business, Education and Local Authorities are invited to the next GSW Leaders Forum – please let Steve Hindley know if any director is interested in attending.

We will also seek:

1. Contributions from partners to resource ongoing work and possibly a profile raising event in London; which has tentatively been proposed for the spring, subject to the support of SW LEPs and South West MPs
2. An early meeting with the West of England LEP to agree bilateral collaborations and what (if any) initial collaboration they will participate in.
3. Following on from the Summit and renewed expressions of support, the GSW offer and ask on infrastructure, sectors, rural now needs refined definition and work is being undertaken on this, supported by the Dorset LEP, CloS LEP, Cornwall Council and others.