

## Heart of the South West Productivity Strategy

**Sub Regional Event (Exeter, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge) – 21 November 2017**

### Consultation Response

**Attendees:** Paul Coles (BT), Richard Carpenter (Enterprise Assist), Richard Jacobs (EIC), Malcolm Dudley-Williams (South Park Estates), Michael Green (Exeter Federation of Small Businesses), James Moffatt (Organic Agency), Nicki Lathwell (Eden Westwood), Adam Powell (Adams Apples), Ann Hunter (Exeter BID), Arianne Wills, Benjamin Lewis, Tom Staniford

**Also in attendance:** Karime Hassan, Victoria Hatfield, Lorraine Betts

The strategy needs to be bespoke for this region. There is no point in trying to replicate Bristol or London because people come here for different reasons. Solutions need to be unique due to an ageing demographic and the type of businesses (lifestyle) we have in the area. Look for business opportunities that exploit the demographic make-up of the area. Services for the ageing demographic is not addressed, health and social care - turn it into an opportunity and an asset.

Need to do a better job of communicating the region and its industries to attract people to live and work here. The brand of region needs to be raised internationally to attract businesses to relocate here and for young people to live here.

The strategy does not state what the offer is for Government. It is important that we work together across the region with a united voice.

We need to recognise regional and sub-regional differences in setting a goal for productivity, each area needs different goals in increasing productivity. Why is the goal to double GVA, what data behind says double is right?

### Connectivity and Infrastructure

In terms of BT broadband, superfast broadband is available but take up has been around 30%. France and Germany have less broadband coverage than Devon and Somerset. Need to consider how to increase take up. Evidence shows that where businesses engage with technology, productivity increases. Research in Cornwall has shown that digital take up has had a significant impact on the economy of Cornwall in terms of GVA.

Greater Exeter is recognised as a tech cluster but could this be extended so that the whole region becomes a tech cluster. Yeovil and Bridgwater are also recognised for their tech industries. Need to collate evidence to say we have a clustering of tech businesses, such as cyber security.

We need to bang the drum about Exeter Airport, in terms of its importance to the regional economy.

Improvements to the road infrastructure, especially along the A303.

Power infrastructure is inhibiting growth, Exeter cookery school had to change their model to enable cookers to go in. Issues with WPD.

Congestion is an issue within Exeter and is restricting growth – this was raised many times throughout the duration of the event.

### People and skills

IT literacy skills across the region are low. This has an impact on productivity because businesses are not using IT to its full potential and are unable to diagnose problems.

Need to have digital skills within traditional economies, such as agriculture.

Within the productivity plan there needs to be a focus on skills from primary schools to lifelong learning.

There is a people shortage within the area, we have reached full employment and the productivity plan doesn't address this issue.

Aspiration levels need to improve for residents born here, there are amazing opportunities for them.

Improvements in broader digital literacy, but what does good look like. Again it's about skills and improving literacy levels at all ages, starting at primary school level. Young people will be having 3 or 4 careers now, and need a range of skills set to enable them to have multiple careers.

People need to learn basic fundamentals in how to interact and social skills. Young people can pick and choose which type of job they do, as there are plenty of vacancies in the Exeter area. Business should work more closely with education and schools to enable them to deliver the right type of people for business needs and the right type of skills.

We need to attract graduates and young professionals and to encourage young people to stay in the area. We need to improve our leisure and cultural offering. It's not just about great coast and countryside, it's about great things to see and do. This is what will encourage younger people to live and work here.

### Rural

Food security needs to be addressed within HOSW, it will be critical very soon. This has been recognised globally as a world class sector. Specialising in this sector could put the region on the world stage. Could have a food farming innovation corridor. This will present challenges because it is not possible to do a pure botany degree in the UK.

Horticultural industry used to be booming in Devon, but not anymore. Teaching in horticulture is broken. Lots of people working in the industry don't own their own housing, some are living in caravans in their parents' gardens.

We need separate strategies for rural and urban areas.

How do we support agriculture and food producers post Brexit?

### Small businesses

Communicating with small businesses needs to be improved to enable SME's and micro businesses to engage with the LEP to drive up productivity. We need to engage with them and for them to realise they are getting something out of the relationship. We should be working with small businesses to nurture them to grow, particularly in rural areas.

### Planning and housing

Planning is an issue overall. Land values prevent young people from living here. Not enough houses to encourage young people to live in the area. Local plan making by local authorities is inhibiting growth. Getting a local plan approved takes far too long – timescales for approval should be 2 – 3 years.

We need investment to put in place the infrastructure to deliver development and housing. This needs to be included in the strategy.

The Localism Bill enables the public to attack local plans.

We need affordable housing in rural areas to enable rural businesses to employ local people which would enable a robust economy.

The LEP needs to prioritise major development and infrastructure developments, it should not adopt a scatter gun approach as this will not drive up productivity.