



Heart of the South West

Devo bid to boost prosperity for South West goes to Government

Council chiefs and business leaders in Devon and Somerset have submitted their 'prospectus for productivity' to the Government in a bid to win more powers to boost jobs and growth.

They say they want a 'devolution revolution' to improve the lives of people in Devon and Somerset.

The prospectus has been submitted to the Government after being separately endorsed by every local authority in the two counties.

They say the changes they propose 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 submission of 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:

- A £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

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 in Somerset and aerospace in Yeovil as well as its traditional industries like agriculture, fishing and tourism.

Somerset County Council leader John Osman said: "This is the culmination of a lot of hard work from a lot of people and to see a document like this endorsed by 23 authorities in such a short space of time is quite an achievement.

"The challenge now is to not lose the momentum. We have to make sure we are pushing our case with Westminster because this bid is about the future prosperity of the region, its businesses and communities and it's paramount that we make the most of the opportunity."

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."

Mr Evans said the bid proposed more growth than the three core cities of Birmingham, Bristol and Nottingham had delivered together over the last fifteen years.

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.

"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."

Notes for Editors:

The Heart of the South West devolution partners are:

- 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, Torrington and West Devon
- Plymouth City Council
- Torbay Council
- Exeter City 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
- Heart of the South West LEP