

**West of England Local Enterprise Partnership  
Board meeting – 1.10.20**

**Update on Covid-19 response**

**Purpose of the report**

1. To update the LEP Board on progress on the regional response to the Covid-19 pandemic and consider next steps.

**Recommendation**

The LEP Board consider the next phase of recovery planning and provide views on the key questions for consideration and the proposed approach to engagement through the Taskforce.

The LEP Board note the updated intelligence on impacts of the pandemic.

**Background**

1. The Regional Economic Recovery Taskforce was established in May to lead work across West of England to drive economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and to feed in to Government's national recovery planning. The Taskforce is a partnership between the West of England Combined Authority, the Local Enterprise Partnership, business, universities and the region's councils. The LEP Chair co-chairs the recovery Taskforce and a number of LEP Board members have also been represented.
2. The work of the Taskforce has covered three time horizons:
  - Short term: crisis response & exit from lockdown
  - Medium term: adaptation & resilience
  - Long term: renewing & growing
3. The Taskforce has consulted widely with over 160 representatives of the business community, voluntary and community sector and academia to develop an action plan for the region's recovery.
4. The Recovery Plan will be published in the papers for the Joint Committee on 9th Oct and will then form the basis of a further round of engagement with stakeholders across the region on what further action is required to support the region's recovery.
5. The Plan sets out strategic actions to support rebuilding of the region's economy across 5 pillars:

- **Rebuild business** to help new and existing businesses to survive and thrive in order to safeguard existing and create new jobs
  - **Get residents back to work** in jobs which pay above the living wage and offer security of employment through targeted training and brokerage to available opportunities
  - **Strengthening inclusion** to prevent further widening of inequalities and build an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential, reducing inequality gaps
  - **Green recovery** to use the changes in behaviour brought about by the pandemic to accelerate our transition to net zero carbon
  - **Renew places** to re-think our approach to 'place' creating greener, healthier, more vibrant places to live and work and so continuing to attract people from across the world
6. Significant work has already been undertaken to develop and deliver a regional package of support for businesses and residents affected by the economic fallout of Covid-19. For example, increased capacity and new products and services have been built into the West of England Growth Hub, utilising additional funds from government and by pivoting existing regional interventions e.g. the creation of Trading Better Online, a Financial Resilience Programme, a new Business Innovation Fund, Workforce for the Future 'SME:skills brokerage service', a Small Business Grant (with a focus on tourism/hospitality) and Thrive at Work West of England.
7. A summary document 'Supporting the Region Through Economic Recovery' has been produced to set out more detail on these initiatives. This is attached at annex 1 and LEP Board members are encouraged to share with their networks where they feel relevant to ensure that businesses and individuals are aware of the support available to them.
8. WECA committee agreed in June 2020 to "...allocate £5m to support West of England businesses during the 2020 early phase of economic recovery advised by the Covid-19 Economic Recovery Taskforce and, where there is urgency, to delegate the approval of the business case(s) to the WECA Chief Executive in consultation with the Chief Executives of the constituent Councils" and "...the Taskforce will provide the evidence base for the design and delivery of such interventions".
- Further, the Regional Recovery Taskforce agreed the following overarching criteria:
- Directly address a **regional economic issue or opportunity** identified and prioritised by the Taskforce
  - Be a genuinely **additional** business and/or skills activity, not covered by existing national, regional and local measures
  - Be able to mobilise quickly generating **immediate, tangible and sustainable impact**
- A number of proposals are in development to drawdown support from the £5m fund. Business cases will be developed for each of these and considered by West of

England CEOs on a case by case basis. These are set out in detail in the investment fund paper for consideration at the Joint Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> October.

9. In addition, as discussed with the LEP Board at a recent informal meeting, WECA is making an ambitious case to Government through the Spending Review process for further resources to drive recovery and renewal through, for example, enhanced Adult Education Budget, devolution of National Skills Fund / FE capital and major investment in our innovation infrastructure capacity and capability. The Spending Review bid is aligned to the strategic actions and priorities coming out of the Taskforce.
10. Successfully navigating the region through this period of unprecedented challenge will require the Combined Authority, Local Authorities, business community, voluntary sector, academia and local communities all working together.

### **Next Steps**

11. This plan should be considered as an initial approach to address the immediate impacts of the crisis. WECA has put in place a range of immediate measures in response to the crisis, and we will implement this Recovery Plan recognising the need for swift action during the current crisis.
12. The next phase of the work will focus on identifying and addressing the remaining challenging questions about the future of the region. We propose to bring a list of potential longer-term areas of focus to the next meeting of the Taskforce for consideration. The LEP Board's input into his list would be welcome. Early proposals include:
  - What is the future for town and city centres and how will workplaces be used in the future?
  - What is the future of the workplace?
  - What is the digital infrastructure required to support the future model of working and living?
  - How do we ensure that the requirements of young people are met not only in terms of training and pathways into employment but also in terms of supporting potential entrepreneurs with the infrastructure they will need to thrive?
  - How can we ensure that the rise in unemployment, particularly in the most deprived areas of the region, does not become entrenched and that people are able to move swiftly back into work?
  - If we continue to move between phases of higher and lower levels of restriction, what support might local businesses need to cope with the uncertainty?
13. In considering the next phase, we propose to move away from the sector focused approach that has supported the development of the recovery plan and instead draw on the pool of experience and expertise represented in those groups in more cross

cutting task and finish groups. We will bring a proposal about how this could work to the next Taskforce meeting.

**14. The LEP Board is asked to consider:**

- **reflections on the first phase of the work of the Taskforce, what worked well and should be build on for the next phase of the work?**
- **the initial list of further questions for phase 2 of the recovery work – what else should be included?**
- **views on the approach to the next phase of the work**

15. In addition we will continue to monitor intelligence and evidence of the impacts of the crisis as it develops, this will help to inform the next phase of recovery planning. Two of the key economic briefings are attached, regional economic insights at annex 2 and the Labour Market Intelligence pack at annex 3.

- Annex 1 – attached at end of document
- Annex 2 – Regional Economic Insights <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/regional-insights/>
- Annex 3 – Labour Market Intelligence Pack - <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Labour-Market-Intelligence-pack-Sep.pdf>

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