

REPORT TO: WECA COMMITTEE & WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 9 October 2020

REPORT TITLE: REGIONAL COVID-19 RESPONSE & RECOVERY PLAN AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN

DIRECTOR: JESSICA LEE, HEAD OF STRATEGY AND POLICY

Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide the Committees with the West of England Covid-19 recovery plan and the related Climate Emergency Action Plan for consideration.
- 1.1 These plans set out how the West of England intends to work towards rebuilding the economy of the region following the Covid-19 pandemic, and how addressing the Climate Emergency is at the heart of the region's ambition for a clean and inclusive recovery.
- 1.2 This agenda item covers two separate plans which are related but independent of each other; the Covid-19 recovery plan is attached at annex 1 of this paper and the Climate Emergency Action Plan including a cover paper is attached at annex 2.
- 1.3 The recovery plan should be considered as an initial approach to address the immediate impacts of the crisis. Whilst the pandemic has already had a significant impact on the region, the situation continues to evolve and the full extent of the long term implications are not yet clear. Work to respond to the impacts of the pandemic will continue over the coming months.

Recommendation (for WECA Committee and Joint Committee)

1. The Committee is asked to endorse the regional Covid-19 Recovery Plan and support the next stages of the Taskforce's work.
2. The Committee is asked to approve the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

Background / Issues for Consideration

- 2 The process and content of the Climate Emergency Action plan is set out in annex 2 including the detail of the engagement that has been undertaken in the development of the plan. The rest of this paper outlines the progress on the development of the Covid-19 Recovery Plan and the next steps for taking forward work to build an inclusive and green recovery.

Regional Recovery Plan

- 3 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.
- 3.1 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
- 3.2 The Taskforce has consulted widely with representatives of the business community, voluntary and community sector and academia to develop an action plan for the region's recovery. This plan is attached at annex 1 and sets out the actions required to drive a clean and inclusive recovery in the short to medium term.
- 3.3 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
- 3.4 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:

Any investment must be able to meet the following 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 separate Investment fund paper.

- 3.5 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

- 4 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.
- 4.1 Whilst the pandemic has had a significant impact on the region, caused massive changes in behaviour and accelerated trends such as home working and digitisation, the situation continues to evolve and the longer term implications are not yet clear. In identifying the likely long term impacts and additional action required to address the challenges that remain, WECA will seek the views of stakeholders on the next phase of recovery. We will also consider longer term planning and how the priorities in the West of England Local Industrial Strategy need to be reviewed in the light of the crisis to reflect the changes in the region's economy over recent months.

Consultation

- 5 The Regional Covid-19 Recovery Plan has been developed by the West of England Regional Recovery Taskforce. Chaired by Mayor Tim Bowles and with the LEP Chair Steve West as Vice-Chair; the Taskforce is a partnership between WECA, the LEP, business universities and the region's councils. Taskforce members have consulted groups of stakeholders from the wider sectors they represent in the development of this plan. In addition, representatives from a range of community groups and organisations working to support disadvantaged groups and communities were consulted through a series of telephone interviews and workshops to discuss the emerging action plan. This plan will support further public engagement on what further steps need to be taken by the region to address the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Public Sector Equality Duties

- 6 The public sector equality duty created under the Equality Act 2010 means that public authorities must have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 6.1 The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:
- Removing or minimizing disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.

- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- 6.2 The general equality duty therefore requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services, including policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.
- 6.3 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been conducted and concluded that there are a wide range of opportunities in respect of the actions detailed within the COVID-19 Recovery Plan which have clear potential to positively impact on all; and targeted actions have clear potential to positively impact on Protected Characteristic groups.

Each of the five areas identified within the Plan will identify actions aimed at ensuring residents and businesses identifying with all Protected Characteristics are involved and supported and that success in achieving this is measured, monitored and reported on an ongoing basis.

Climate Change Implications

- 7 On 19 July 2019, the West of England Combined Authority declared a climate emergency, recognising the huge significance of climate change and its impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of the region's residents. The Combined Authority is committed to taking climate change considerations fully into account as an integral part of its governance and decision making process.
- Each report/proposal submitted for Combined Authority / Joint Committee approval is assessed in terms of the following:
- Will the proposal impact positively or negatively on:
- * The emission of climate changing gases?
 - * The region's resilience to the effects of climate change?
 - * Consumption of non-renewable resources?
 - * Pollution to land, water or air?
- Particular projects will also be subject to more detailed environmental assessment/consideration as necessary as part of their detailed project-specific management arrangements
- 7.1 The climate emergency action plan will be a key part of our Covid-19 recovery plan. It is about supporting our climate emergency goal alongside securing our economic future following the covid-19 outbreak.

Finance Implications, including economic impact assessment where appropriate

- 8 £5m of WECA Investment Funding has been awarded to the Regional Taskforce to allocate to defined, targeted, areas to stimulate economic recovery in the region. A further allocation of £4.395m is proposed within the Investment Fund report, to this committee, with the report providing details on which priority areas the funding will be allocated.

The overall WECA Investment Programme will be kept under regular review with consideration given to further allocations to the Taskforce if appropriate.

Advice given by: Malcolm Coe, Director of Investment and Corporate Services

Legal Implications

- 9 The legislation and guidance being issued as a result of Covid-19 and climate emergency will need to be kept under review as the actions outlined are implemented. This will ensure that WECA is complying with its statutory obligations.

The combined and unprecedented impact of Covid-19 on the local economy, both on businesses and the workforce, will exacerbate inequalities, with some groups disproportionately impacted for the short, medium and long term. The need for robust equalities impact assessments at the appropriate time is therefore critical.

Advice given by: Shahzia Daya, Director of Legal

Land/Property Implications

- 10 There are no direct land/property implications arising from this report, however we are committed to embedding our zero-carbon goal within our business plan, policy, programmes and projects.

Human Resources Implications

- 11 There are no direct human resource implications arising from this report, however we are committed to embedding our zero-carbon goal within our business plan, policy, programmes and projects.

ANNEXES:

ANNEX 1 – Regional Recovery Plan

ANNEX 2 – Climate Emergency covering report and Action Plan

West of England Combined Authority Contact:

Any person seeking background information relating to this item should seek the assistance of the contact officer for the meeting who is Ian Hird on 07436 600313; or by email: democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk