

**West of England  
West of England LEP Board**

Thursday, 1 October 2020, 9:30am  
Meeting held virtually via Zoom

**Present:**

Zoe Metcalfe, ValueSwift  
Joanne Rumley, Foot Anstey  
Margot Day, Buro Happold  
Richard Bonner, Arcadis  
Heather Cooper, Hargreaves Lansdown  
Prof Steve West, West of England LEP  
Katharine Finn, PwC  
David Brown, The Bristol Port Company

Neil Douglas, Viper Innovations  
Christopher Grier, Airbus  
Dick Penny, Watershed  
Jon Reynolds, GDS Digital  
Cllr Toby Savage, South Gloucestershire  
Mayor Tim Bowles, West of England Combined  
Authority  
Cllr Dine Romero, Bath and North East Somerset  
Cllr Donald Davies, North Somerset Council

**Officers In Attendance:**

Patricia Greer, Chief Executive  
Menna Davies, Head of Communications, WECA  
Pete Davis, Head of Grant Management and  
Assurance  
Antony Merritt, Head of Enterprise, Inward  
Investment and Trade  
James Cooke, South Gloucestershire Council  
Susan Hayter, Bath & North East Somerset  
Council

Lynda Bird, Head of Performance Planning &  
Projects  
Jess Lee, Head of Policy & Strategy  
Helen Edelstyn, Senior Policy Manager  
Malcolm Coe, Director of Investment and  
Corporate Services  
Stephen Bashford, Director of Business and  
Skills

**Apologies:**

Mohammed Saddiq, Mayor Marvin Rees

**Minutes**

		<b>Action</b>
1	<p><b>Welcome and apologies</b></p> <p>The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting which was held virtually via Zoom and apologies were noted.</p> <p>The Chair announced that Prof Sue Rigby the Vice-Chancellor of Bath Spa University would join the Board as the new HE representative. This would take the Board membership to 20, including 8 female members [40% of our board membership]. This trajectory would be continued in order to meet the 2023 target of 50%.</p>	
2	<p><b>Minutes of the meeting of 12 June 2020</b></p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to an amendment on Page 5 to replace 'place' with the word 'space' in the following sentence:</p> <p>"Cllr Savage raised the importance of <b>place</b> and the built environment, such as potential job losses in the aerospace industry may have on Filton"</p>	

3	<p><b>Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>The following Declarations of Interest were declared:  Steve West (Chair) – declared an interest as Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West of England (UWE) due to the University’s contractual work with SMEs;</p> <p>Katherine Finn – declared an interest as a Trustee of Avon Wildlife Trust.</p> <p>Cllr Dine Romero – declared an interest as a member of the National Trust.</p>	
	<p><b>Items for discussion</b></p>	
4	<p><b>Update on Covid-19 response</b></p> <p>The LEP Board was updated on the progress on the regional response to the Covid-19 pandemic and asked to consider the next steps.</p> <p>It was noted that the Regional Economic Recovery Taskforce had been established in May 2020 to lead work across West of England to drive economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and to feed into the Government’s national recovery planning. The work of the Taskforce was covering three time periods: Short term – the crisis response and exit from lockdown; Medium term e.g. adaptation and resilience; and Long term - renewing and growing.</p> <p>The report stated that significant work had 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 had 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.</p> <p>Furthermore 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”.</p> <p>In addition, WECA was 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 was aligned to the strategic actions and priorities coming out of the Taskforce meetings.</p> <p>The Recovery Action Plan has been appended to the report and would be considered by WECA Committee at its meeting on 9 October 2020 as an initial approach to addressing the immediate impacts of the crisis. The Plan set out strategic actions to support rebuilding of the region’s economy across 5 themes/pillars. A list of potentially longer-term areas of focus would be brought to the next meeting of the Taskforce for consideration. The LEP Board’s input into this list was requested. Early proposals included the following:</p>	

- 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?

The following comments were received:

- Concerns were raised about the rural economies particularly around the adequacy of IT provision in rural areas. Under 20% of business premises had not got full fibre broadband access. Further funding from government to support this area was a priority;
- Place/cultural tourism went beyond city centres and barriers that existed for people to come back into work went wider than merely geographical locations;
- There should be greater emphasis on green recovery with an aspiration to go beyond just relying on behavioural change and temporary reductions in carbon emissions;
- Rentals were rising in the city centres due to “gentrification” with a potential effect on those who may be affected by rising unemployment and the BAME communities;
- The recovery plan needed to support the cultural sector and small business, micro businesses and self-employed who did not always qualify for support;

It was stated that a set of indicators were being worked on in order to measure progress against the action plan which mainly covered the small and medium term challenges, whilst acknowledging that there may be a new set of problems arising from the second wave lockdown.

**Agreed:**

(1) That the comments received from LEP Board on the Covid-19 Recovery Plan be noted and used to inform future recommendations;

(2) That the LEP Board note the updated intelligence on impacts of the pandemic.

5

**Climate Emergency Planning & Action plan**

Helen Edelstyn introduced a report setting out the Climate Emergency Planning and Action Plan which would be considered by WECA Committee at its meeting on 9 October 2020.

The climate emergency action plan was a key part of WECA’s Covid-19 recovery

plan and supported the climate emergency goal alongside securing the region's economic future following the covid-19 outbreak. It formed part of a set of plans for the region, stemming from WECA's Local Industrial Strategy, and set out the ambitious action needed to deliver clean and inclusive economic growth. Five main challenge areas had been identified in the Action Plan:

1. Low Carbon transport System;
2. Low Carbon Business;
3. Renewable Energy;
4. Low Carbon Buildings and Places;
5. The Green Environment;

The target was to hit carbon neutrality by 2030.

A number of specific issues relating to the Covid-19 situation that impacted on or were addressed through the report were as follows:

- Working towards the decarbonisation of the transport system and increasing cycling and walking and the use of public transport; building on positive behaviour change following the covid-19 lockdown period;
- Helping business and local people benefit from growth in the green economy; maximising government green recovery investment in the region and supporting our businesses to build back better;

The following comments were made:

- The region needed to speak with one voice and be clear in its asks to government, although it was acknowledged that the real tests could come when projects had to be rejected if they did not meet the ambitions set out;
- It was queried whether there was any newer data than the two years lag as it made it difficult to assess the impact of various measures. It was reported that new data would be available soon;
- More emphasis on ecological factors was requested;
- A query was raised about how financial incentives for different initiatives could work. It was noted that it was important to work alongside government over what was possible and what was not possible and make the case for money to be invested in the region (for things like sustainable hydrogen) and to focus on new technologies;
- The Board expressed its thanks to Helen Edelstyn and her team for their work to support development of the Climate Emergency Action Plan;

**Agreed:** (1) That the comments received from the LEP Board on the Climate Emergency Action Plan be noted and used to inform future recommendations;

(2) That the draft climate emergency action plan be noted in advance of the 9 October meetings of the WECA Committee and West of England Joint Committee.

(3) That having considered the role that the LEP Board can play in focussing and coordinating the necessary activities, it be recognised that addressing the climate change emergency will require action from a wide range of partners across the region, by:

- Board members' organisations taking action;
- The Board stimulating and providing a focus for activity both between
- Board members' organisations and with the wider business community;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board identifying and championing best practice examples and</li> <li>• low carbon innovation; and</li> <li>• Considering whether the Board wishes to identify a sub-group /champion to take forward work in this area.</li> </ul>	
6	<p><b>Local Growth Fund and Getting Building Fund</b></p> <p>Pete Davis introduced a report informing the LEP Board of the integrated programme for the Local Growth Fund and Getting Building Funds and gave an update on delivery.</p> <p>The report stated that the West of England had been awarded £202.1m of capital funding through the Local Growth Fund (LGF) for the period 2015/16 to 2020/21. Whilst requirements around spend in year that were in place for the first two years of the Fund had now been relaxed, there had always been a requirement that all funds had to be spent by March 2021. It had been hoped that this hard end date for the LGF would be relaxed as the funding period came to a close but, despite lobbying through a number of channels, that had not proved the case. Indeed, as reported to the LEP Board in June 2020, owing to the impact of Covid-19 Government had retained one third of the LGF for 2020/21 whilst LEPs provided information on planned delivery and spend. After providing such reassurance, WECA had now secured the final third of the LGF for the current year. To help manage this hard LGF end date, structured overprogramming had been employed for some time and this currently stands at around £12m.</p> <p>In June 2020 Government announced the Getting Building Fund (GBF) aimed at funding capital projects which could help to accelerate national recovery. In July 2020, WECA had been informed that its award through this fund was £13.7m over 2020/21-21/22 spanning the LEP geography.</p> <p>Given there were around £12m of commitments (including £7m of contractual commitments) in place for LGF schemes which were beyond the funding received or expected, and that it was assumed that the overhang would be picked up by any successor programme to the LGF, it is intended that the GBF be used to enable the full funding and completion of the schemes within the LGF programme. It was not expected that any further LGF successor funds would be received for 2021/22.</p> <p>Pete confirmed that the LGF programme was on course for full spend but that it was hoped further flexibility for the GBF would be obtained.</p> <p>The following points were raised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government was reluctant to commit to additional long-term financial commitments at the moment as it was dealing with the immediate crisis around Covid-19 but that the lobbying in this area would continue. Speaking with one voice and a clear message was cited as important;</li> </ul> <p><b>Agreed:</b> that the LGF programme, the forecast spend position and risks be noted.</p>	
7	<p><b>West of England International Market Prioritisation Study</b></p> <p>Antony Merritt gave a presentation on the draft of the International Market Prioritisation study commissioned by the West of England Combined Authority</p>	

(WECA) and delivered by OCO Ltd.

The West of England Local Industrial Strategy recognised the region's strengths and assets, setting out clear priorities to drive sustainable economic growth. It was determined that in order to fully capitalise on global market resources and capabilities, a coherent long-term approach to international market engagement was needed to ensure that the region continued to attract high quality foreign direct investment, raised its international profile, and further supported businesses in overseas trade and international collaboration. The importance of inward investment and trade in driving economic recovery, had also been recognised as a key 'strategic priority' by the Regional Recovery Taskforce.

To help deliver this ambition, WECA commissioned OCO Ltd to undertake a detailed market prioritisation strategy that identified and categorised a series of source markets based on level of fit with current capabilities, demands and pre-existing regional plans and activities. This included 5 main areas of focus:

- *Review of Regional Priorities* - analysis of the markets which had been most commonly cited by each regional agency and the drivers behind the selection of this market;
- *Supply & Demand Side Analysis* - analysis outlining those markets which showed the greatest FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) potential for WECA's priority sectors;
- *Review of WECA and partnership organisations* - a series of recommended potential engagement activities by sector and markets that would be both feasible and beneficial to the region's efforts in growing FDI, trade and collaboration;
- *Benchmarking Competitor Agencies* - SWOT analysis of select competitor agencies and implications for the region; and
- *Stakeholders Consultations* - final report that presented the market prioritisation strategy with accompanying evidence, including any views shared by select teams on proposed prioritisation.

The following comments were raised:

- It was suggested there was a need for a group to connect this work together across the West of England;
- Further work was needed to consider the opportunities and challenges of working with stakeholders across the Western Gateway area;
- A number of potential target countries may have been omitted, such as Norway and the Emirates. However, most of the countries listed could not be reached by plane from Bristol;
- It is likely that domestic tourism would increase if international travel diminished, although there was a distinction between international trade and leisure travel. It was reported that the internal flight levels in China had returned to around 90% of pre-pandemic levels;
- Work around the Avonmouth/Sevenside logistics opportunity and Bristol Freeport was a separate debate as this report was mainly concerned with global reach. It was noted that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was keen on free trade zones;

**Agreed:** That the report be noted and comments received from the LEP Board on the West of England International Market Prioritisation Study be taken into account in future activity.

8	<p><b>WECA Committee and Joint Committee reports</b></p> <p>The Chair invited any comments from the LEP Board with regard to the content of the reports being submitted to the WECA Committee and Joint Committee on 9 October 2020, which had been published on 29 September 2020. He stated that comments could also be submitted after this meeting via email to himself or Patricia Greer and these could be reported to the WECA Committee to be considered as part of their decision-making.</p> <p>Agreed: that any specific comments on the WECA Committee reports be passed to Steve West or Patricia Greer in advance of the meeting on 9 October 2020.</p>	
	<p>The next meeting to be held on Wednesday, 20 January 2021, 10.00 am, arrangements to be confirmed nearer the time.</p>	

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