

**West of England Local Enterprise Partnership
Board meeting – 9th March 2021**

Recovery phase 2: future of town and city centres

Purpose of the report

1. To provide the LEP Board with an update on the work underway on phase 2 recovery planning.
2. To support the Board's consideration of workstream 1, future of town and city centres, and how the Board would like to ensure the voice of business is reflected.

Recommendation

The LEP Board are asked to consider the specific questions on workstream 1, 'what is the future for **town and city centres** and how will places be used in the future?' and to discuss the following issues:

- Beyond the three key drivers of change identified below, are there other driving forces that are impacting on our towns/city centres?
- To what extent are businesses in the West of England planning for these changes? (eg hybrid working etc.)
- What do these mean for businesses and employers in the West of England?
- What makes the West of England an attractive place to do business and how do our towns and cities contribute to that?
 - What features do employers want to see in towns/cities in the future?
- What are the implications for businesses of emerging preferences for 'staying local'?

Background

Recovery Phase 1

3. Our regional recovery plan was published in October 2020. This plan set out immediate actions to support people and businesses directly impacted by the economic challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic. Actions sit alongside broader national and local activity to tackle the impact of the virus.
4. To deliver the plan, existing programmes and plans across the region have been refocused, and a regional recovery fund has been established – funding a range of activity, including supporting people to reskill, supporting small businesses, and high street renewal.

Recovery Phase 2

5. The conclusions of the recovery plan highlighted a range of medium-term challenges to our regional economy as a result of Covid. Issues such as changing models of work, increased reliance on digitally enabled business models, etc. On some issues, the pandemic has sped up pre-existing areas of change, on others, new challenges have emerged. Phase 2 of our recovery work will consider these medium-term challenges. The conclusions of this phase will serve as a bridge between our immediate action to stabilise the economy and getting the region back on track to deliver the Local Industrial Strategy. The conclusions of this work will influence our approach to the Spending Review and broader engagement with Government on opportunities to strengthen our regional recovery.
6. There are three broad drivers of change that Covid has brought to our regional economy:
 - Social distancing, restrictions and concerns for health
 - Increase in home/remote working
 - Acceleration of digitisation/ecommerce
7. These drivers have influenced changes in behaviour during the pandemic, some of which may sustain and some of which has accelerated existing evolutions in the way we live, work and travel. The drivers of change will have impacts across our regional economy, raising a series of questions to explore as we plan for the future.
 - i. What is the future for **town and city centres** and how will places be used in the future?
 - ii. How can we **support people to move swiftly back into work and young people to progress?**
 - iii. How can we **support businesses and sectors to harness and capitalise on innovations** Covid has required?
 - iv. What are the **climate change implications of the ‘new normal’?** How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (**1: Transport**)
 - v. What are the **climate change implications of the ‘new normal’?** How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (**2: Energy and wider opportunities**)
 - vi. **How have communities been impacted** and how do we support recovery in different areas?
8. The next steps for each of these workstreams is set out at annex 1.
9. The LEP Board are invited to focus on the first of these questions and to consider what themes we need to reflect in this work from the perspective of local employers of all sizes, anchor institutions and other groups represented on the LEP Board.
10. The role of the business community will be central to the future of the region’s town and city centres and the LEP Board are invited to consider the following questions:

- Beyond the three key drivers of change identified above, are there other driving forces that are impacting on our towns/city centres?
- To what extent are businesses in the West of England planning for these changes (e.g. hybrid working etc.)
- What do these mean for businesses and employers in the West of England?
- What makes the West of England an attractive place to do business and how do our towns and cities contribute to that?
 - i. What features do employers want to see in towns/cities in the future?
- What are the implications for businesses of emerging preferences for 'staying local'?

11. Officers will highlight the existing activity across the region and will present the key pieces of evidence to support the discussion.

Annex 1

Key question	Next Steps
What is the future for town and city centres and how will places be used in the future?	Working group including UAs, anchor institutions, business community to help answer key questions
How can we support people to move swiftly back into work and young people to progress?	Ask Skills Advisory Panel to ensure key questions are taken into consideration as work progresses
How can we support businesses and sectors to harness and capitalise on innovations Covid has required?	LEP Board convene discussion with broad sector representation to understand longer term implications and opportunities of drivers of change for delivery of the LIS
What are the climate change implications of the ‘new normal’? How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (1: Transport)	Ensure key questions are taken into consideration in development of infrastructure priorities, through infrastructure advisory boards
What are the climate change implications of the ‘new normal’? How can the opportunities be maximised and challenges mitigated? (2: Energy and wider opportunities)	Reflect key questions in implementation of Climate Emergency Action Plan and Green Infrastructure Strategy
How have communities been impacted and how do we support recovery in different areas?	Use data to develop understanding of where impacts have been most acute – identifying whether communities / places have been hard hit that we have not previously focused on Review WECA activities in light of analysis to identify gaps