

**REPORT TO: WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: 8 SEPTEMBER 2023

REPORT TITLE: REGIONAL STRATEGY REFRESH

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Purpose of Report

- 1 This report provides scrutiny with an update on the process underway to refresh the regional strategy.

Recommendation

That the Scrutiny Committee note and comment on the approach being taken to the development of a refreshed regional strategy

Background / Issues for Consideration

- 2 We are refreshing our regional strategy so we have a renewed articulation of our regional priorities and the outcomes we are seeking to deliver for people, communities and the region – tackling inequalities, addressing the climate and ecological emergency and evolving our economy for the good of all our residents. Having an up to date strategy for the region is an important tool in helping confirm our shared regional ambition; guide future decision making; and provide clarity to local partners and national and international investors about the opportunities across the West of England.
 - 2.1 The West of England last produced a regional strategy in 2019. The Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) was co-produced between the region and government and set a direction that drew on the region’s strengths and contributed to the ambition of the Government’s national Industrial Strategy.
 - 2.2 There has been significant national and regional change since the LIS was published. When Mayors and Leaders met earlier this year to discuss regional priorities, they agreed that a refresh of the regional strategy was needed – restating a collective vision for the region and guiding delivery and investment for the coming period.

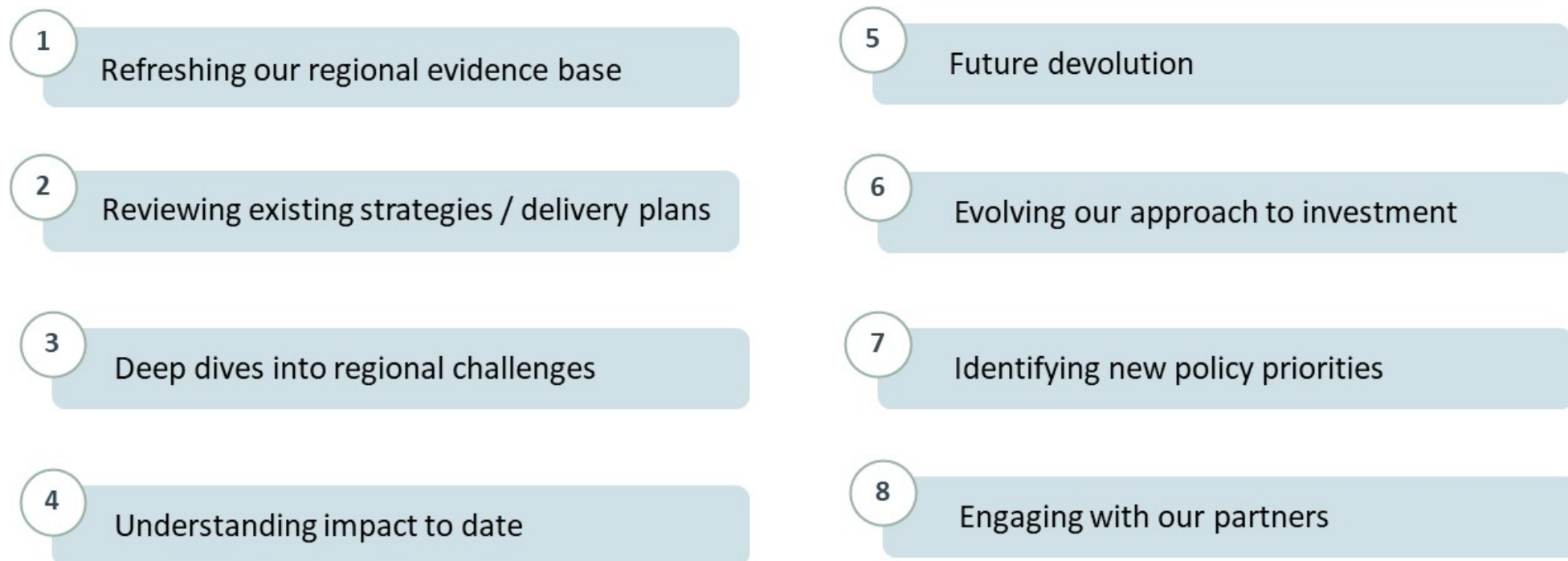
- 2.3 As one of the recommendations of the independent peer review of the Combined Authority undertaken by Solace, the regional strategy refresh sits within and is supporting the wider transformation programme that the Combined Authority is undertaking. The work is progressing in close collaboration between the Combined Authority and Unitary Authority officers and the regional CEOs group is acting as a steering board for the work.
- 2.4 As Figure 1 shows, it is anticipated that the regional strategy will set an overarching direction to guide the broader work of the region. It will provide the context for a range of delivery plans that will be developed or refreshed to ensure the vision set in the strategy is translated into clear implementation plans.
- 2.5 The refreshed strategy will also act as a guide to support future investment decisions and provide potential investors with a clear vision of regional priorities and opportunity.

Figure 1: the role of the refreshed regional strategy



- 2.6 To deliver the refreshed regional strategy, a number of workstreams are underway. As shown in Figure 2, workstreams range from a refresh of our regional evidence base, through to assessments of our impact to date, and incorporating work such as considering how we might evolve our approach to investment.

Figure 2: workstreams underway to inform the regional strategy refresh



2.7 The workstreams set out above are being progressed through a newly established regional strategy working group, bringing together CA and UA officers to deliver the work and keep the CEO steering group updated on progress.

2.8 The refreshed evidence base (workstream 1) was used to underpin the initial Mayors and Leaders discussion that concluded a refreshed regional strategy was required. The evidence base is being peer reviewed by a range of external bodies such as the Government Economic Service, Office for National Statistics, the Centre for Cities, and other leading think tanks. The evidence base is available online here: [West of England regional evidence base 2023](#).

2.9 The evidence base covers a wide range of areas (as set out in Figure 3), providing a robust assessment of the strengths and challenges of the region.

Figure 3: areas covered in the West of England regional evidence base 2023

We have produced an overview of how our region is developing, highlighting where we have strengths and opportunities to build on and where we have challenges to address. The evidence base is not exhaustive, but provides a guide to assist decision making on how we help the region continue to evolve

1: Quality of life

This section looks at macro-economic trends, regional challenges and strengths that are impacting quality of life for people across the region

2: Our environment

This section sets out the scale of the challenge we face in delivering on our climate and ecological commitments. It highlights areas we will need tackle to reverse or mitigate the impact of climate change

3: Our places

This section looks at the issues fundamental to creating places people want to (and afford to) live: housing; town and city centre development

4: Our people

This section looks at the people that make up this region and the demographic changes we are experiencing

5: Jobs & training

This section looks at our employment landscape, skills across the region and how people are progressing in their careers (or where further action is needed to help people progress)

6: Economic growth & innovation

This section looks at the economic strengths and opportunities we have to develop our region further to develop new jobs and opportunities for people. It also highlights areas where further focus is needed to unlock opportunity.

7: Connecting people and places

This section looks at the digital and transport connectivity strengths and challenges we need to address to connect as many people as possible across the region

2.10 The regional evidence base is wide ranging and highlights that while many of the conclusions reached about the strengths of the region during the production of the LIS hold true, there are growing areas of challenge that we should seek to address. It concludes:

- The economic outlook remains challenging, but we have some real assets that improve quality of life for people living here. The region is attractive to visitors and residents: our population is growing at a faster rate than the national average
- Carbon emissions must fall sharply to hit our net zero goals, with action across society including retrofitting over 250,000 homes and building renewable power sources
- Wildlife in the region is declining, and with temperatures likely to rise by 1.7-3.9°C by the 2050s, we need to build resilience into infrastructure, homes and businesses, and the environment
- The region's cultural assets and green spaces make our communities good places to live, but housing is increasingly unaffordable and many local high streets are struggling
- Residents are highly qualified (52% at NVQ 4+) and we have an excellent skills pipeline with four strong universities. But there are challenges with school outcomes for young people
- And some residents cannot access decent living standards: almost 50,000 residents are unemployed or inactive but want work, and employment is 12% lower among minority ethnic groups than in the white population, and 23% lower among those with disabilities than those without. And there are significant inequalities in health outcomes
- The region has a diverse mix of businesses across a range of knowledge-intensive industries, and high levels of innovation. But productivity is slipping behind the national average (5% behind in 2021), which holds back wages and living standards
- Public transport use is recovering following the pandemic, but carbon emissions and congestion both remain high, hampering people from the journeys they need to make for work and leisure.

2.13 The next phase of work to deliver a regional strategy will be the development of an initial discussion document, drawing on the conclusions of work to date. This will provide a route to update Mayors and Leaders on progress in the strategy development and seek their guidance on potential priorities and areas for action they would like to see prioritised. Further engagement with partners across the region will also take place to help refine the work and ensure there is a joint commitment to the direction the strategy ultimately sets. Figure 6 provides scrutiny committee with an overview of action to date and anticipated next steps in this programme of work.

Figure 6: progress to date and next steps in the strategy development process



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