

## **West of England Local Enterprise Partnership Board Board meeting – 29 September 2023**

### **Refreshing our regional strategy**

#### **Purpose of the report**

1. To provide the LEP Board with an update on progress in refreshing the regional strategy.

#### **Recommendation**

- It is recommended the LEP Board note progress to date and provide feedback on issues it would be helpful to emphasise in the next phase of developing a refreshed strategy.

#### **Background**

2. We are working to refresh our regional strategy, providing an up-to-date articulation of the ambition and priorities of the region over the medium to longer-term. This will replace the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) as are core regional plan, recognising that since 2019 when the LIS was published, new regional priorities have emerged and there has been considerable regional and national change that we should reflect in our future plans.
3. A refreshed strategy will give us a clear vision around which we can frame regional delivery plans. We can also use a refreshed strategy to engage national and international investors and Government, highlighting our strengths, challenges and regional assets to help make the case for further investment in the region.
4. Over the Spring and Summer, we have refreshed our regional evidence base (which can be found here: <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/about-us/our-strategy/regional-strategy/>) and carried out a range of engagement with partners across the region. The remainder of this paper provides an overview of what we have heard from partners to date.

#### **Ambition for the region**

5. From our engagement to date, three broad ambitions have been highlighted as areas that should shape our future plans. Partners have highlighted outcomes we should focus on are:
  - Delivering a greener West of England. Placing our climate ambitions at the heart of all we do.
  - Making the West of England a more equal, fair and inclusive region, making sure the region is a place where people right across the region have opportunity.

- Supporting the region to be more prosperous. Making sure all residents have rising quality of life, improving incomes, living standards and that the region is growing in a more sustainable way.

## **Our region**

6. Through engagement over the Summer, we have tested the evidence base, including with the LEP Business Board and with officers across each of the Unitary Authorities and a range of government and independent economic experts.
7. Our evidence base shows the West of England is a dynamic, creative region that provides a high quality of life to residents.
8. We have a strong, diverse economy; people have access to good jobs and we're continuing to attract new employers and industry to the region. It's a place people want to be, that creates opportunities, and that benefits from the diversity of our residents and businesses.
9. But there are challenges too. While we are making significant progress on our net zero ambitions, we need to go faster to decarbonise all areas of society, and we need to do more to protect and enhance our natural environment.
10. We need to widen opportunities for people from deprived parts of the region or disadvantaged groups. And we need the conditions in place for living standards across the region to rise, from investing in our transport system to strengthening business productivity.
11. Through the work to date, we have also looked at the differing needs of places across the region, whether that is our economic cores, the urban and suburban realm, or the villages and rural areas of the region. Our engagement has drawn out that while the building blocks of all places requires some degree of commonality (good access to public transport, high speed digital connections, good quality affordable homes, access to good jobs) – the way we deliver in different places needs careful consideration, ensuring we meet the specific needs of our different places and communities.
12. Our engagement highlights that partners feel we are building on some strong foundations and there is good delivery we should look to amplify through our refreshed strategy – such as the rapid escalation of work to tackle the climate and nature emergencies; increasing range of skills provision that is helping people develop skills that employers need both now and in the future; and the development of new transport links between the places people live and the employment locations across the region. Engagement also highlighted there is a clear ambition to support the region to go further still in each of these areas.

### **Priorities for the future**

13. Out of the initial phase of work to refresh the regional strategy, a set of potential future priorities have started to emerge. Priorities that regional colleagues have highlighted are:
  - Creating a well-connected region with the transport and digital links that make us a world-class place.
  - Creating a greener West of England, placing our climate and nature ambitions at the heart of everything we do.
  - Creating the jobs and training our region and residents need both now and in the future.
  - Supporting sustainable communities that people are proud to call home.
  - Putting the West of England on the map for national and global success – attracting new investment to the region.
  
14. Across each of these priorities, colleagues have highlighted specific areas of work that could be scaled up, challenges where we know new longer-term action is needed and new levers that we need to help us deliver.
  
15. Partners have also highlighted a range of ways we should evolve how we work together to deliver for people across the region. Areas colleagues have highlighted as potential routes to evolve include:
  - Building longer-term funding arrangements so we can plan, invest and deliver in a sustainable way – ultimately speeding up delivery.
  - Maturing our approach to investment: simplifying access to funds and working funding harder.
  - Continuing to identify areas of further devolution could help us deliver on our ambitions.
  - Speeding up the process to spread good ideas across the region.
  - Exploring a wider range of issues where the region may want to work together.
  - Changing the way we engage with people across the region and beyond.

### **Questions for the LEP Board**

16. To inform the next phase of work to refresh the regional strategy, it would be helpful to have views from the LEP on:

- Whether there are other outcomes or ambitions for the region that we should focus on.
- Whether there are additional areas of evidence it would be helpful to build into our evidence base.
- Whether the five emerging priorities we have heard from partners are in line with the views of the Board.
- Whether there are other ways we should consider how we evolve as a region to deliver for the communities and people of the West of England.
- Are there unique challenges and opportunities or assets within the West of England that we should seek to draw out as this work progresses?

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