

West of England Economic Recovery Taskforce – 21 July 2020

Summary / action notes

(note: the slide deck presented at the meeting is enclosed as Appendix A)

Taskforce members present:

Members:

Mayor Tim Bowles	West of England Mayor (Chair)
Steve West	Local Enterprise Partnership (Vice Chair) - apologies
Cllr Dine Romero	Bath & North East Somerset Council
Cllr Craig Cheney representing	Representing Mayor Marvin Rees, Bristol City Council (apologies from Mayor Rees)
Cllr Don Davies	North Somerset Council - apologies
Cllr Toby Savage	South Gloucestershire Council – apologies
Samantha Payne	Open Bionics
Kathryn Davis	Destination Bristol & Visit Bath
David Coombs	Skills for Logistics & The Skills Group
Katherine Finn	PWC - Apologies
Peter Alvis	Lye Cross Farm
Rick Sturge	Business in the Community
Natasha Swinscoe	West of England Academic Health Science Network
Paul Craig	Rolls-Royce - apologies
Claire Smith	Buro Happold (apologies from Margot Day)
Neil Douglas	Viper Innovations
Richard Bonner	Arcadis
Jon Reynolds	GDS Digital
Dave Lees	Bristol Airport
David Brown	Bristol Port
Nigel Costley	South West Trades Union Congress
Dick Penny	West of England Cultural Strategy Group
Joanne Rumley	Foot Anstey, & West of England Skills Advisory Panel
Phil Smith	Business West
Poku Osei	Babassa
Ian White	University of Bath
Andy Forbes	City of Bristol College

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Mayor Marvin Rees, Cllr Toby Savage, Cllr Don Davies, Steve West, Paul Craig and Margot Day.

Introductory comments from the Chair:

* Nationally and regionally, the impact of business closures, job losses and redundancies due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the scale of the recovery challenge ahead are now beginning to be seen.

* Rapid response action is being taken in connection with the [REDACTED] redundancy situation.

* Work is progressing in terms of offering and ramping up a range of interventions, in close liaison with DWP and taking account of the needs of businesses and employees.

* Full account was also being taken of the series of measures announced by the Chancellor around boosting the labour market and skills development, including the announcement about the Kickstart scheme through which the government will pay 6 months of wage costs of 16-24 year-olds at risk of long-term unemployment who are hired by employers.

* He thanked everyone involved through the Taskforce and sector groups for their ongoing extensive work. It was essential that an evidence-led approach was continued to assess the economic impact of the pandemic and the government's economic measures on businesses and communities, identifying where additional support is needed and feeding back to government accordingly.

* The Taskforce is working towards a full recovery plan (for the medium term) being in place for October. Work is being taken forward on developing responses and actions to the 9 key policy topics/challenges as identified through the sector groups; full details of 3 of the key challenges and proposed actions were being presented/discussed at today's meeting.

*Moving forwards, the work initiated through the Taskforce needs to be highly focused and targeted, addressing the very real challenges faced by all areas within the region and by all sizes of business, and must continue to drive and embed clean and inclusive growth.

2. Context for today's main discussion

Patricia Greer highlighted the following (see also slides 1-3 at Appendix A for full detail):

* The agreed design principles for recovery planning.

* Outline details of the 9 identified policy topics/challenges. 3 papers were being presented at today's meeting; the remaining 6 will be circulated within the next 2 weeks.

*The Taskforce were asked to consider the criteria that will be applied in relation to the £5m allocation (agreed by the WECA Committee in June) for interventions to support West of England businesses during the 2020 early phase of economic recovery:

Investments must be able to meet the following 'YES/NO' **gateway 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**

3. Discussion on policy/topic papers

Paper 1: Significant job losses at all skill levels and stages of working lives

Joanne Rumley and Stephen Bashford highlighted the key aspects of the actions to be taken forward – see also slide 4 at Appendix A.

Key points:

* The proposals have been developed through extensive discussions at the Skills Advisory Panel.

* 4 key proposals will be taken forward:

- Proposal 1 is a fully co-ordinated response, including a SME skills brokerage service delivered through the Workforce for the Future programme (building on current activity); the establishment of a rapid response group; and the development of a bespoke Talent Retention Platform.
- Proposal 2 will develop a package of training/re-training co-designed with multiple partners.
- Proposal 3 will develop a 'green skills support package' to re-deploy and re-train people.
- Proposal 4 will improve outreach facilities and develop network of community outreach/skills hubs targeting key groups

Paper 2 - Young people without access to training or employment

Stephen Bashford outlined the range of proposed actions – see also slide 5 at Appendix A – key elements include maximising apprenticeship support and lobbying government about reviewing and easing apprenticeship criteria, and about funding and support for FE and HE (including skills capital funding); and co-ordinating multi-partner effort to support young people to start-up businesses, via an expanded Growth Hub.

Feedback on papers 1 and 2:

*** There was general support for taking forward the key principles / proposals and recommendations detailed in the papers.**

Specific comments

Andy Forbes:

- strongly welcomed the fact that real and tangible initiatives are coming forward.

- given the number of initiatives being taken forward (e.g. Kickstart, apprenticeships, traineeships), communications and clarity about the range of options available to young people in particular will be key, as well as ensuring a customer centred approach.

Ian White:

- supported the view that communications are key, especially in relation to those who are disadvantaged / feel excluded. At the individual level, people will need to believe that longer-term opportunities are going to be available. People need to be able to understand how initiatives relate to themselves in individual terms.

- also supported the need for clarity about options available – e.g. in relation to opportunities around digital skills and green skills. ‘Green’ thinking needs to be embedded into all activity, embracing both short term, more immediate activity such as retrofitting buildings and longer term innovations and interventions.

Dick Penny:

- supported the previous comments but amplified that proposals need to gain genuine credibility as they are taken forward.

- young people, particularly those who currently feel marginalised, will need to be supported through pathways to employment that are meaningful – effective co-ordination at the local level will be critical. This care and support to young people in helping them to understand the workplace must be credible and the approach must be fully joined-up.

The Chair highlighted that:

- innovation and driving clean and inclusive growth remain as top priorities and should continue to be seen as forming the region’s ‘USP’.

- it will be essential to work with government, employers and individuals to maximise apprenticeships as pathways to employment – harnessing talent will be vital to businesses.

* In response to a question, it was noted that the full detail of the Kickstart initiative is awaited. The government is likely to be seeking a delivery partner – the strong preference locally is that regional commissioning should be pursued.

Paper 3 – Accelerated digital transformation

Jon Reynolds and Stephen Bashford outlined the range of proposed actions – see also slide 6 at Appendix A.

Key points highlighted:

* The identified proposals are designed to improve digital access and skills, including a focus on excluded communities.

* The proposals also aim to identify growth opportunities and support digital transformation, in the context of changing work behaviours/patterns.

* A joined-up regional, multi-partner approach to developing the full range of digital skills, ranging from the 'lower' level to the 'medium' and 'higher' levels will be essential.

* An identified quick-win is the rebooting of the Smart Alliance as the digital acceleration force envisaged in the Local Industrial Strategy with a sharpened focus on resilience and recovery (proposal 1).

* The region also needs to be alive to all funding opportunities in this area.

Feedback on paper 3:

*** There was general support for taking forward the key principles / proposals and recommendations detailed in the papers.**

Comments:

Andy Forbes: Need to very mindful that for many students, there is an issue/barrier around the costs associated with improving digital skills – e.g. the cost of IT equipment, meeting broadband/wi-fi costs at home – the issue of ensuring digital accessibility is a national and regional issue.

* It was also suggested that whilst the situation was not necessarily a major immediate concern in all parts of the region, every opportunity should nevertheless be taken around improving rural digital connectivity.

4. Date of next meeting:

- 3.00 – 4.00 pm Tue 18 August 2020

