

West of England Economic Recovery Taskforce – 15 September 2020

Minutes / action notes

Taskforce members present:

Mayor Tim Bowles	WECA
WECA CEO Patricia Greer	WECA
Vice Chancellor Steven West	Local Enterprise Partnership
Andy Forbes	City of Bristol College
Dave Perry	South Gloucestershire Council
David Lees	Bristol Airport
David Brown	The Bristol Port Company
David Coombes	Skills for Logistics & The Skills Group Ltd
Dick Penny	WofE Cultural Strategy Engagement Group
Cllr Dine Romero	Bath & North East Somerset
Cllr Donald Davies	North Somerset Council
Hope Summers	City Of Bristol College
Ian White	Bath University - Apologies
Jo Walker	North Somerset Council
Joanne Rumley	Foot Anstey & WofE Skills Advisory Panel
Jon Reynolds	GDS Digital
Katharine Finn	PWC
Kathryn Davis	Visit Bath / Destination Bristol
Margot Day	Buro Happold
Mayor Marvin Rees	Bristol City Council - apologies
Nigel Costley	SWTUC
Neil Douglas	Viper Innovations
Oliver Rooke	BEIS
Paul Craig	Rolls Royce

Peter Alvis	Lye Cross Farm
Phil Smith	Business West
Poku Osei	Babassa
Richard Bonner	Arcadis
Rick Sturge	Business in the Community [BITC]
Samantha Payne	Open Bionics
Simon Earles	Bristol Airport
Natasha Swinscoe	WEAHSN - Apologies
Will Godfrey	Bath & North East Somerset

Note: the summary slides displayed and referred to at the meeting are enclosed at Appendix A.

1. Welcome and apologies / setting the scene for the meeting

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Toby Savage, Mayor Marvin Rees and Natasha Swinscoe.

Introductory comments from the Chair - update on activities since the last Taskforce meeting and on feeding into the government's Spending Review:

The Chair highlighted the following points:

- * He shared feedback he'd received through discussions in other Combined Authority areas, who had praised the quality of work and outputs achieved through the Taskforce over the summer.
- * Businesses and organisations across the region are continuing to work hard to facilitate employees moving back safely into the workplace; in light of the ongoing situation, the need to ensure the right balance between office/workplace based and home-based working solutions is a key consideration.
- * The Business Insights Panel continues to offer valuable viewpoints, research and intelligence. It is clear, from discussions at the most recent Panel meeting, that, despite the challenges to be faced, there is a really positive outlook from businesses that the region is well positioned and should be confident about encouraging and developing a strong economic response and kickstarting the regional economy.
- * The evidence-based approach that has been developed through the sector groups has culminated in the production of the draft Regional Recovery Plan, to be discussed at today's meeting. The Recovery Plan needs to be seen very much as an initial approach to address the immediate impacts of the Covid/economic crisis and sets out the strategic actions to support the rebuilding of the region's economy across the 5 identified 'pillars' of recovery.

* Ongoing lobbying of politicians and government continues in the context of aiding the region's recovery, including recent meetings with the Ministers of State for Transport and BEIS.

* In the context of the government's Spending Review, detailed work is also ongoing to ensure that the region feeds into this process and articulates fully the region's needs, priorities / ambitions and associated funding requirements, taking full account of the needs of businesses. It will be essential to continue to build on the region's pre-Covid reputation and strengths, particularly around innovation and collaboration.

In concluding his introductory comments, the Mayor again thanked all members of the Taskforce and the LEP Board for all their efforts and ongoing work.

2. Consideration and discussion of the draft Regional Recovery Plan.

With reference to the slide pack (see Appendix A), Patricia Greer and Steve West made introductory comments, highlighting the following:

* In producing the draft Recovery Plan as included in the agenda papers, full account has been taken of the feedback from the last Taskforce meeting and from a series of meetings with sector leads on the strategic actions.

* The ambition underpinning the Plan is:

'Build back better by capitalising on our ingenuity, creativity and diversity to create good jobs and a high quality of life for all our residents whilst achieving sustained emission reductions. As we build back our places, we will strive to create greener, healthier, more vibrant communities to live and work to ensure the region continues to attract visitors, talent and investment from around the world.'

* The Plan sets out strategic actions to support rebuilding of the region's economy across 5 identified pillars:

- **Rebuild business** to help new and existing businesses to survive and thrive in order to safeguard existing and create new jobs.
- **Get residents back to work** in jobs which pay above the living wage and offer security of employment through targeted training and brokerage to available opportunities.
- **Strengthening inclusion** to prevent further widening of inequalities and build an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential, reducing inequality gaps.
- **Green recovery** to use the changes in behaviour brought about by the pandemic to accelerate our transition to net zero carbon.
- **Renew places** to re-think our approach to 'place' creating greener, healthier, more vibrant places to live and work and so continuing to attract people from across the world.

* Further comments and feedback on the Plan were now sought from Taskforce members. Outside of today's meeting, Taskforce members were also encouraged to send in any further comments and input by **5.00 pm on 18 September**. It was suggested comments should be focused in particular on:

- What can be further emphasised or clarified within the Plan.
- Are there any gaps? - and what needs to be added to the Plan.

Summary of comments from this meeting:

(Note – comments submitted during the Zoom meeting through the ‘Chat’ function during the meeting were also captured and will be taken into account in refining the Recovery Plan document).

- * Support expressed for the 5 pillars / themes as set out but important to ensure that the full level of operational detail underpinning actions is fully captured in work plans moving forwards into implementation.
- * In terms of city centre / town centre / high street renewal, it is important to recognise there may need to be subtle differences of approach depending on location / local circumstances.
- * In terms of ‘Rebuild business’, it was suggested there will need to be a particular focus on assisting some businesses (e.g. aerospace related) which may be lost forever, whereas other businesses (e.g. cafes and restaurants) will recover or be replaced by similar enterprises over time; need to consider the ‘hierarchy’ of businesses recognising that larger businesses are fed by an ‘eco-system’ of smaller enterprises.
- * City/town centre space / use will need to be re-imagined – need to recognise that work patterns have changed, perhaps for ever. Pre-Covid, there was a challenge around the night time economy in and around major office locations; post-Covid, there will be challenges around the day time economy in some locations.
- * There could be radical and more fundamental changes around city centre space uses; the reimagining of centres is likely to see decreased retail use and significantly increased residential use. Noted that this may be an increasing issue for the medium-long term; the current Recovery Plan is focused on more immediate actions.
- * It was suggested that a ‘good employer standard’ be built into the proposals along with a meaningful indicator around this; will need to be backed up by a procurement policy.
- * Some concerns expressed more immediately about the potential impact of a second wave of redundancies from the airport; further lobbying of government needed around extra action to support businesses as furloughing ends.
- * In terms of the ‘Get residents back to work’ pillar, it will be important to have a strong focus on supporting young people in accessing opportunities; in terms of inclusion, there must also be positive action to support those from ‘hard to reach’ communities.
- * Health and social care is very likely to be a growth area of employment – it will be important to encourage employers in this sector to look for talent and employ people being made redundant by other local employers, accepting that some re-training may be required. There is a need to try to build as much ‘slickness’ and join-up as possible through employment hubs to try to spot opportunities for newly redundant people to find alternative opportunities.
- * In terms of the ‘Get residents back to work’ pillar, enhanced collaboration should be encouraged in the digital sector with the universities and the digital industry working as closely together as possible.
- * In terms of the ‘Green recovery’ pillar, we need to promote the low carbon agenda but also need to be mindful of opportunities around nuclear / hydrogen activity and electrification in supporting the economic re-build.
- * In terms of the presentation/marketing of the Plan we need to ensure it brings out the key ‘punches’ of the region’s ambition – so that the Plan stands out from others, particularly in terms of seeking additional resource from government.

* In terms of the 'trade' aspects under the 'Rebuild business' pillar, a stronger reference to export should be included, recognising the need to take up new trade opportunities as part of the recovery.

* In the short term, in terms of the 'Rebuild business' pillar, as part of the work to help businesses survive, we should consider a KPI about the number of jobs saved through interventions.

In terms of the 'Green recovery' pillar, it will be important to ensure that new schemes and opportunities are open to all businesses.

* In terms of the 'Rebuild business' pillar, inbound tourism should be regarded as an export, recognising there is support needed to enable business to access these markets.

* As the Plan moves into implementation, it will be important to identify a timeline for achieving 'near time wins' to demonstrate successes – e.g. to demonstrate successes in job creation and getting people back to work. This will need some prioritisation of resource, used to best effect.

At the conclusion of the discussion, it was noted that the Plan will be further updated and re-circulated (noting that, as above, 18 September will be the final deadline for comments).

3. Update on WECA initiatives already in place to support the region, including £5m Recovery Plan; progress, update and next steps.

With reference to the slide pack (see Appendix A), Stephen Bashford highlighted the following:

* Actions taken to enhance and build capacity and streamline/simplify access to business support, including:

- FutureBright expansion to help individuals.
- Expansion of the Growth Hub to act as a 'one stop shop' / portal to assist businesses.
- Rapid Redundancy Response including a multi-agency group to target support to businesses at risk of, or making, redundancies, and their employees.
- Developing a Talent Retention Platform.
- The Workforce for the Future programme, to be launched shortly.

* Other new initiatives include:

- A partnership between WECA and Business West to deliver a small grants programme for business adaption (focussed support available for the tourism and hospitality sectors).
- A support package for 'peer to peer' networking and collaboration across multiple sectors to facilitate sharing of best practice and knowledge.
- Thrive at Work West: offering regional SMEs help in responding to mental health concerns in the workplace, particularly those arising from Covid-19.

- The launch of the Business Innovation Fund, under which grants of between £20-50k are available on a match-funding basis to support bringing new innovative products, services and technologies to market faster.

* Proposals are being brought to the WECA Committee on 9 October for the allocation of the £5m Regional Recovery Fund. The fund is essentially being used as 'catalyst' funding to support early priorities as identified by the Taskforce.

4. Wrap up and summary of next steps

The Chair thanked all Taskforce members for their comments and positive input.

He reiterated the aim is to use the evidence-based Recovery Plan to drive initial actions and to help make the case to government for additional support to support the region's recovery and build on clearly identifiable economic strengths.

It will be crucial for all Taskforce members to champion the plan and actions being taken; the Plan will be focused on initial actions but it is his expectation that the Taskforce should now also begin the task of considering the medium-longer term landscape.