

# West of England Recovery Plan

September 2020

The West of England has developed an ambitious programme to build back better, greener and stronger. We are one of the UK's economic success stories, with a strong, vibrant economy, which has the potential to support wider national growth. By working together as well as securing additional investment, we will achieve our recovery ambition to:

“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'll strive to create greener, healthier, more vibrant communities to support those who live and work here, ensuring our region continues to attract visitors, talent and investment from around the world.”

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## Forewords



My role as the chair of the West of England LEP is to bring together the best of business and education with the public sector, to provide a strong, powerful voice for our region. And never has that been more important than now, as we face the impact of Covid-19.

In developing this recovery plan we have worked with our LEP and the wider business community. We have worked with over 180 businesses across all sectors as well as voluntary and community groups. We have canvassed more widely the views from thousands of individuals and businesses across the region, to ensure that our recovery is inclusive and representative.

This is a strong plan which sets out those key areas we have to focus on right now to ensure the future success of our region, but of course, it will need to evolve as the world changes around us. It will require us to be innovative, creative and responsive as we learn to adapt, recover and reset our world.

This is the challenge we are all facing, but the strength and diversity of our economy, coupled with our real strengths as a region formed on new ideas and doing things differently, means that we are in a strong place to meet this challenge, and build back better, seizing the opportunity to accelerate our plans to deliver clean and inclusive growth.

**Steve West,**  
Chair of West of England Local Enterprise Partnership



The West of England is a place of innovation and creativity; from the days of Brunel, through to the latest developments in robotics, our region is home to world-leading technological change. It is a beautiful place with rich cultural activity, vibrant industry and home to a diverse population.

Covid-19 is having a huge impact on our region and all of us who live here – the way we live, work and enjoy our free time with families and loved ones. But it also provides an opportunity.

We came into this as a leading regional economy, and we can build on the progress we have made so that every community benefits from extra investment and new opportunities as we emerge from the pandemic.

This is an ambitious plan to:

- Rebuild business
- Get residents back into decent jobs
- Strengthen inclusion
- Support a green recovery
- Renew places

The plan has been created by experts in industry, education and communities. This work is just beginning, and now we have a road to follow.

I'd like to thank everyone involved for all their hard work in creating this plan for recovery and renewal and encourage us to continue working in collaboration work to make it a reality.

**Tim Bowles,**  
West of England Mayor

# West of England Recovery Plan: At a glance

## Our economic trajectory – pre-crisis

			
Most productive city region in England outside London	Emitting 14% less carbon per person than the national average	Highly skilled workforce with higher than average employment and wages	Creative, innovative vibrant region, with USPs in aerospace, creative, digital and professional services

## But economic impacts are significant

			
Economy likely to shrink by 7%, with recovery unlikely until end of 2021 at the earliest	30% of region's workforce was furloughed	Unemployment benefit claims risen from 2% to 5% since February and job vacancies fallen	44,100 residents claimed Self-Employment Income Support, with claims of £131m

## The plan: rebuilding across 5 pillars

				
<b>Rebuilding business</b> to help new and existing businesses survive and thrive in order to safeguard existing and create new jobs	<b>Getting residents back into jobs</b> which pay above the Real Living Wage and offer security of employment through targeted training and brokerage to available opportunities	<b>Strengthening inclusion</b> to prevent further widening of inequalities and build an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential, reducing inequality gaps	<b>Supporting a green recovery</b> using changes in behaviour brought about by the pandemic to accelerate our transition to net zero carbon	<b>Renewing places</b> 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
<b>CLEAN AND INCLUSIVE</b>				

## At a glance continued

### With strategic programmes

	<p><b>Rebuilding business</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly expand the region's <b>business support offer</b> to help businesses of all types to adapt and survive, finding sustainable, low carbon pathways to recovery and growth</li> <li>• Implement a targeted approach to <b>inward investment, export and trade</b>, unlocking new growth and job opportunities</li> <li>• Drive job creation through significant investment in <b>new regional innovation projects</b>, to creatively address global challenges such as the climate emergency, health and equality of opportunity</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Getting residents back into jobs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance our <b>Redundancy Response Initiative</b>, including a new <b>B2B Talent Retention Platform</b> to help redeploy workers</li> <li>• Develop <b>regional Employment and Skills Opportunities Portal</b> to help unemployed residents find new jobs, careers support and advice, and training opportunities</li> <li>• Ramp up <b>re-training</b> with new packages developed and deployed in partnership with recruiting employers and aligned with growth areas (including health and social care, construction, low carbon and digital)</li> <li>• Address <b>youth unemployment</b> with a regional apprenticeship support service, expanding of sector based approaches</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Strengthening inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Strengthen engagement</b> to help under-represented groups access skills and enterprise support through <b>community champions</b> and a <b>regional network of outreach facilities</b></li> <li>• Launch a new <b>Community Grant scheme</b> to build additional local capacity and resilience in hardest hit communities, with a focus on creating pathways to employment and skills</li> <li>• Creating a <b>Good Employer Standard</b> led by anchor institutions across the region to create, good, accessible jobs, which are paid the Real Living Wage</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Supporting a green recovery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upscale the <b>Low Carbon Challenge Fund</b> through an enhanced Green Business Grant programme and <b>Local Energy Schemes</b>, helping existing businesses to transition to low carbon approaches, as well as creating new businesses and jobs</li> <li>• Make significant investments to <b>decarbonise our energy and transport systems and enhance our green infrastructure, building on the positive behaviour changes brought about by lockdown</b></li> <li>• Maximise the region's share of national green stimulus packages, including retrofit</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Renewing places</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure investment in <b>infrastructure and affordable housing</b> to achieve strategic place-making and decarbonisation objectives</li> <li>• With our communities, re-imagine and re-invigorate our towns and city centres with an <b>innovative town centre re-structuring programme</b>, building on the increased need for 'local liveability'</li> <li>• Help the region's tourism and cultural sectors recover through the development of a <b>Regional Tourism Zone</b> and new <b>Cultural, Creative and Digital Development programme</b></li> </ul>

## What will we achieve?

Delivering the proposals in this plan will give the region a strong foundation for recovery. Our current plans will deliver the outcomes below by 2025, and we will continue to drive up the impact of our action as we develop the proposals. WECA is investing over £500m up to 2025 to support the region's recovery and economic development, in line with this plan and the local industrial strategy.

	<p><b>Rebuilding business</b></p> <p>Over 11,200 businesses supported to adapt their operations, boost staff skills, and innovate                  £90m planned investment in innovation facilities and research and development projects, and a pipeline of new projects of £300m+</p>
	<p><b>Getting residents back into jobs</b></p> <p>1,800+ jobs created, plus 750 construction jobs a year across our investments                  22,000+ training and skills placements each year</p>
	<p><b>Strengthening inclusion</b></p> <p>Support residents to access good, secure jobs                  Deliver careers advice to 95 schools and colleges                  10,000 people take online mental health at work course                  Widen community access to business and skills support</p>
	<p><b>Supporting a green recovery</b></p> <p>Support retrofit of homes                  1m new rail journeys, and walking and cycling transformed in 30 high streets                  60 new low carbon business grants</p>
	<p><b>Renewing places</b></p> <p>£320m+ invested in the region's transport and housing by 2023                  Spatial Development Strategy established through consensual approach                  Publish Cultural Strategy &amp; establish Cultural Compact                  Strategies in place for the town and city centres most vulnerable to changing movement and shopping patterns</p>

## Delivered through

			
<p>Collective action and partnership working</p>	<p>A people-centred approach, with the needs of users at its heart</p>	<p>Using our existing investment portfolio as well as a £10m Recovery Fund</p>	<p>Securing additional resources from Government through devolution and partnership bids</p>

# Introduction

This plan has been developed by the West of England Recovery Taskforce, which was set up to drive the region's economic recovery following the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The plan covers the four council areas of the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership area – Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

This plan will need to evolve, because we recognise that our journey through recovery may not be linear. We will adapt our approach, increasing emphasis on those activities that respond best to local and national circumstances.

## An economic success story – essential to the national economic recovery

The West of England is one of the country's economic success stories. We are the most productive city region in England outside

London, with vibrant innovative businesses and a highly-skilled workforce. With economic links to Wales, the Midlands, London and the South West, ensuring a strong economy recovery in the West of England will help to drive a wider national recovery.

## A region renowned for its innovation, collaboration and ingenuity – helping us to build back greener, better and stronger

Our success stems from a long tradition of innovation, from Brunel and Concorde, to the latest developments in robotics and virtual reality. The West of England is a region renowned for its collaboration, ingenuity and creativity and benefits from a pool of talent and expertise across four universities. It is a place where ideas flourish, businesses grow and where creative, digital and high tech meet traditional industry. It is at this interface that the solutions to the global challenges of the future



lie, helping us to build back greener, better and stronger as well as contributing to national and global efforts to reduce carbon emissions.

## High-value, globally-leading sector strengths and assets are at risk

Our Local Industrial Strategy highlighted our three distinct and overlapping sector strengths that drive innovation and export, supported by supply chains and four world class universities: advanced engineering including aerospace; creative, cultural and digital industries, and financial businesses and legal tech services. Ensuring our region retains these unique assets will be vital to our recovery and future success.

## Where the impact of the pandemic has been unprecedented

However, despite our strengths, the impact of Covid-19 is unprecedented. At the time of writing:

- 30% (170,900 employees) of the region's workforce had been furloughed
- unemployment benefit claims have risen from 2% to 5% since February, a rise of 23,000 people
- 44,100 residents have claimed Self-Employment Income Support, with claims amounting to £133m by the end of July
- the effects have varied across different parts of the economy, with the retail, hospitality, cultural, and aerospace sectors particularly hard hit.

It is likely that the economic impact will get worse before it gets better. With further redundancies and job losses expected in the autumn (as the furlough scheme draws to a close) the impact could be unparalleled. Therefore, the taskforce has worked at pace to put in place urgent response measures, which are set out in the next section.



## With an uneven impact, the need for an inclusive recovery is stronger than ever

We also know that the impact will not be evenly distributed across our communities. Our intelligence confirms that within the West of England, like elsewhere, people in disadvantaged groups and communities have been hardest hit. Therefore, our recovery plan sets out a wide range of actions which we aim to co-design and deliver with local organisations to ensure the hardest hit people and communities get the support they need, preventing existing inequalities from widening, and, in the long-term closing the gap.

## Tackling climate change is an opportunity to reboot our economy

Both locally and nationally, it has been recognised that action to transition to a zero-carbon economy provides an opportunity to stimulate economic growth.

***'We have a great opportunity now to transition to a zero-carbon economy and implement measures to help boost the economy, create jobs and build climate resilience'***  
(Committee on Climate Change, 2020)

We intend to seize this challenge and are committed to tackling climate change in a way that benefits every resident and helps to reboot our economy.

## Introduction continued



The West of England has an ambitious goal of becoming net carbon neutral by 2030. This is shared by our council partners and goes further than the UK target, which commits the country to becoming net carbon zero by 2050. Our Climate Emergency Action Plan is therefore a key part of this Recovery Plan and the detailed Climate Emergency Action Plan sits alongside it.

### Building on the Local Industrial Strategy for clean and inclusive growth

Our recovery plan continues to build on vision set out in our **Local Industrial Strategy**:

**‘Drawing on the unique strengths of the region to drive clean and inclusive growth’**

Therefore the principles of clean and inclusive growth are addressed through both specific targeted actions, as well as cutting across everything else we do.

# Impact of Covid-19 on the region

This part of our plan summarises the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our region to date. It draws on national and local statistics, and intelligence from regional businesses and partners.

The West of England went into the crisis in a strong position. It had a diverse employment base, across multiple sectors, providing economic resilience as well as low unemployment levels. However, despite these strengths, the scale and global nature of the economic shock means that the impact has ricocheted across our whole economy.

## Economic output has fallen dramatically

Lockdown and ongoing restrictions have significantly reduced business output, and in many cases forced them to close temporarily. This has hit incomes, employment prospects, and investment plans. Between February and May, output nationally fell by a quarter and almost a quarter of businesses paused trading. Although output has recovered in recent months, it is still considerably below February's levels. A recent Oxford Economics forecast made a baseline estimate that the region's economy would shrink by 7% in 2020 as a whole (in line with the UK) but would recover its prior level by the end of 2021. However, a more pessimistic scenario could see output remaining below its peak until 2025.

## Government support schemes have helped

Intelligence from our taskforce and sector groups suggest that the **national stimulus packages** have helped many businesses absorb the shock and adapt in the short term. The West of England Combined Authority successfully lobbied government highlighting early instances of gaps in support. To date, this support includes:

- 16,703 grants distributed to businesses by the region's councils, totalling £209.4m
- 44,100 have claimed Self-Employment Income Support, with claims amounting to £132.7m
- £35.5bn lent across the UK in Bounce-Back loans
- £13.7bn lent to UK SMEs in Business Interruption Loans

## But unemployment has risen

The challenges facing businesses are already having an impact on jobs. The proportion of people in the West of England claiming unemployment benefits has risen from 2% in February to 5% in July 2020, an increase of 23,000 people. The furlough scheme has helped to reduce the impact; 170,900 employees in the West of England have been furloughed. At 30% of the eligible workforce, this is similar to the national level (32%). However, intelligence from our sector groups has highlighted a concern that as the furlough scheme draws to a close this autumn, many furloughed staff may be made redundant.

While job losses are expected across all sectors and all skills levels, some groups are expected to be harder hit than others, through higher exposure to affected sectors, or through reduced opportunities. This includes young people, over 50s, and those who are already disadvantaged in the labour market (including women, disabled people and people from BAME backgrounds).

## Impact of Covid-19 on the region continued

Parents, particularly lone parents, may struggle to balance work and childcare, as well as people juggling work with caring for elderly or disabled relatives. As a result, the crisis risks widening existing inequalities, and experience from the last recession showed that it took longer for those with lower skills to restart employment.

For individuals who have lost their job or are at risk of losing their job, or business owners facing the prospect of losing their business, the consequences are enormous. People are worried about how they will pay their bills, feed their families and keep debt collectors at bay. Linked to this, the number of people suffering from stress and anxiety, as well as more complicated mental health issues, has risen during the pandemic. Our support programmes must therefore be easy to find and provide the right advice to businesses and individuals when they need it.

### The impact on sectors varies significantly

While almost all sectors have experienced a drop in economic output, some are clearly more negatively impacted than others, with the largest falls seen in accommodation and food services.

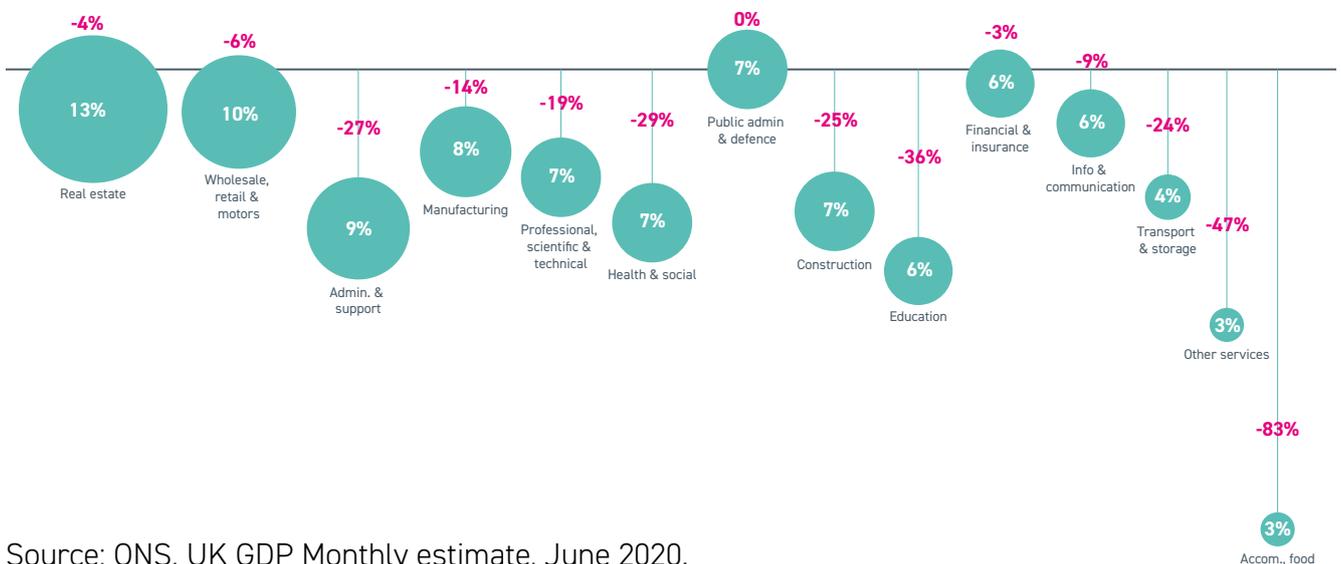
Wider intelligence from our sector groups highlighted particular vulnerabilities and risk of redundancies in: retail; civil aviation and its supply chain; tourism, accommodation and food; and creative sectors, as well as the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector.

### Accelerated digitisation

Across all sectors, businesses are adapting. And we're also seeing accelerating digitisation across society. At the height of lockdown, almost half of employees did some of their work from home, and changes to working practices are likely to persist. Similarly, online retail jumped from 19% of sales in February to 33% in May, although it has since fallen back slightly. These accelerated trends highlight the importance of action which improves:

- digital infrastructure
- digital skills and inclusion
- digital transformation for businesses

**Figure 2:** Proportion of regional GVA (bubble size, 2018) and national change in activity from February to June 2020 (red figures)



Source: ONS, UK GDP Monthly estimate, June 2020.

## Mobility has decreased

Mobility in the region fell sharply at the start of the pandemic, and remains below pre-Covid levels as travel and working patterns have changed – potentially forever. These behaviour changes pose significant challenges for our towns and city centres, which may require a more fundamental re-imagining to create vibrant, liveable spaces for the future, to avoid a spiral of decline.

Whilst walking and cycling increased during lockdown, public transport use has been lower, around 30% of pre-Covid levels for rail, and 40% for bus, nationally. Maintaining these increases in walking and cycling could be crucial to enable people to return to work safely and tackle transport emissions.

## Positive environmental effects may be lost

The pandemic has had a radical and rapid impact on carbon emissions and the environment. UK emissions fell by 31% during the peak of lockdown, particularly due to reductions in transport. There was a significant reduction in air pollution. However, as the Committee on Climate Change points out, lockdown is not a blueprint for reducing emissions, and “...it is unlikely that the pandemic will fundamentally alter the trajectory for emissions”. As lockdown has eased, environmental impacts have returned, highlighting the need for a more sustained transition. Finally, recovery from previous recessions has embedded carbon-intensive investment, which must be avoided this time.

# Strategic ambition

Our recovery plan continues to build on vision set out in our **Local Industrial Strategy**:

“Drawing on the unique strengths of the region to drive clean and inclusive growth.”

Our overarching ambition for this recovery plan is to:

“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.”

## What will success look like?

The recovery plan is expected to deliver actions over distinct phases, aligned with the impacts of Covid-19, therefore our objectives will differ for each phase as illustrated below:

<b>1. Crisis response – Initial crisis and lock down</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain public safety</li> <li>• Ensure key public services function safely (eg transport)</li> <li>• Ensure long term viability of non-essential services through mothballing</li> <li>• Minimise economic damage to businesses and individuals through effective signposting and support services</li> </ul>
<b>2. Short term – Emerging from lock down</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimise rising unemployment resulting from the end of the furlough scheme</li> <li>• Support individuals and sectors not yet able to return</li> <li>• Keep people moving through safe sustainable transport</li> <li>• Plan for the delivery of socially distant services</li> <li>• Develop plans to renew hardest hit places</li> </ul>
<b>3. Medium term – adapting to a socially distant economy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase business resilience and help organisations adapt to social distancing and new market conditions</li> <li>• Support individuals (including the most disadvantaged) to prepare for new and existing job opportunities as well as stimulating job creation</li> <li>• Retain high value skills and sectors, building on our creative innovation assets and ensuring region is well placed to respond to emerging opportunities</li> <li>• Embed positive behaviour changes to reduce carbon emissions and identify actions to support sustained reductions</li> <li>• Safeguard cultural and creative assets, ensuring the region maintains its character and identity</li> </ul>
<b>4. Long term – a vaccine or effective treatment becomes available/risk significantly reduced</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Return economic performance to growth</li> <li>• Create good jobs that are accessible to all (including the most disadvantaged) to reduce poverty and inequality</li> <li>• Create high skilled jobs which ensures that the region remains at the cutting edge of technology</li> <li>• Achieve sustained emission reductions to ensure the region achieves carbon neutrality by 2030</li> </ul>

However, we recognise that our journey through recovery may not be linear, if the number of cases begin to rise or local lockdowns are required, we will adapt our approach, increasing emphasis on those activities that respond best to local and national circumstances.

## Key principles for recovery

The task force agreed the following principles for recovery, which form the five pillars of our plan.

				
<p><b>Rebuilding business</b> to help new and existing businesses survive and thrive in order to safeguard existing and create new jobs</p>	<p><b>Getting residents back into jobs</b> which pay above the Real Living Wage and offer security of employment through targeted training and brokerage to available opportunities</p>	<p><b>Strengthening inclusion</b> to prevent further widening of inequalities and build an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential, reducing inequality gaps</p>	<p><b>Supporting a Green recovery</b> using changes in behaviour brought about by the pandemic to accelerate our transition to net zero carbon</p>	<p><b>Renewing places</b> 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</p>
<p><b>CLEAN AND INCLUSIVE</b></p>				

The following pages set out details of our initial strategic actions under each pillar. However, there is still much to be done in considering our long-term response. Whilst the pandemic has caused massive changes in behaviour and accelerated trends such as home working and digitisation, the extent to which these changes

will be permanent is not yet clear. Therefore the taskforce will continue to work through some of the more complex and challenging long term issues and further strategic action may be brought forward in due course.



# Actions: rebuilding business

## What is our ambition?

To help new and existing businesses to survive and thrive in order to safeguard existing, and create new jobs.

## What are the key issues, challenges and opportunities?

Issues and Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Businesses contracting/ceasing trading</li> <li>• Stimulus packages have helped, but drawing to a close</li> <li>• Need to help businesses pivot to the new normal in order to survive and protect jobs</li> <li>• Concerns about a second spike/local lockdowns</li> <li>• R&amp;D spending threatened in some cases</li> <li>• Variable impact on sectors including regional USPs such as aerospace</li> <li>• Accelerated digital transformation</li> <li>• Availability of cash reserves and capital for growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation stimulated by necessity and/or opportunity</li> <li>• Disruption caused by pandemic is providing opportunities for some, stimulating enterprise and innovation</li> <li>• Digital transformation key to survival of many businesses</li> <li>• Inward investment has remained buoyant</li> <li>• Establishment of a Freeport</li> </ul>

## What is already being done to 'Rebuild Businesses'

The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is leading a targeted business support programme to help kick-start the regional economy. Our focus is on rebuilding a strong economy, to enable long-term recovery for the West of England. The aim is to help businesses build their financial resilience, innovate and adopt best practice, and boost their productivity – helping them to safeguard and ultimately create jobs.

Since the start of the crisis, we have substantially enhanced the offer available through the region's **Growth Hub**, (which is open to all types of business). We have boosted our team of Enterprise Executives who provide direct advice and support to businesses as well as referring them to a range of new measures including:

- **Trading Better Online**
- **Financial Resilience**
- **Intellectual Property Support**
- **Mentoring for Growth**

From March to mid-August there were over 46,000 visits to the Growth Hub website and the over the same period the WECA Enterprise Team had 2623 interactions supporting 649 businesses. Equally, partners in the region, such as Business West have also enhanced their offer, providing services such as **'Trading through Coronavirus'** providing support to businesses to access critical information, including guidance on People and Employment Law, Business Continuity and Coping with Financial Impacts.

As well as providing generic business support that responds to the needs of businesses, we have also taken action to support innovation, including:

- Launching a new **Business Innovation Fund**
- Re-framing and Relaunching the **Digital Engineering, Technology and Innovation (DETI)** programme
- **Bristol+Bath Creative**
- The **Creative Scale-Up** programme

These initiatives, as well as others in the pipeline, bring together leading companies, technology disruptors and universities to push the boundaries, collaborate and tackle global challenges. As highlighted in the **Government's R&D roadmap**, Research and Development will be critical to economic and social recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, enabling us to build a greener, healthier and more resilient UK. Against this backdrop, we will continue to **lead a regional innovation response**, making the case for significant new investment which allows a step change in our Research and Innovation infrastructure.

And, given that inward investment enquiries have remained buoyant throughout the crisis, we have commissioned an **International Market Prioritisation Study** to better understand the inward investment market post pandemic and provide an evidence-based position on new market and sector growth potential. This will be used to inform our approach to inward investment through the recovery period.

## What are we going to do next to rebuild businesses

In the short term and using existing capacity we will:

- Continue to build and deliver targeted support and account management for the region's key strategic sectors eg creative Industries, aerospace and advanced engineering, where impact will have significant knock-on effects across the region's economy
- Commission a review of need, opportunities and possible approaches to increasing **access to relevant capital for growing firms**
- **Reboot the Smart Alliance** to accelerate digital as set out in the Local Industrial Strategy, with a sharpened focus on resilience and recovery. This includes a forum for public/private collaboration to progress new cross-regional technology capacity, digital infrastructure and capabilities. A key tool for the alliance could be the development of **Digital roadmaps**, focusing on addressing key digital challenges, such as connectivity (urban and rural), inclusion and digitisation within businesses
- Pilot new approaches to **improving business leadership**, focusing on resilience and adaption, including diversity, capacity and competence of boards, using our productivity challenge programme
- Extend the region's **Productivity through People Programme** to drive SME innovation and sustainable growth
- Through the Growth Hub, develop a Universal Business Support offer to ensure the range of business recovery resources are targeted at those sectors and communities with greatest need
- Lead a regional innovation response to develop a package of innovation interventions

Alongside this, we will co-design and work with partners to put in place three strategic programmes to rebuild businesses:

## Actions: rebuilding business continued

### Strategic programmes

<p><b>FURTHER ENHANCE OUR BUSINESS SUPPORT OFFER TO HELP BUSINESSES ADAPT, SURVIVE AND FIND SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY AND GROWTH</b></p>	
<p><b>Further expand the support available through the Growth Hub to include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small grants and tailored business support for adaptation and resilience (with specific support for the tourism, hospitality and cultural/creative sector including freelancers)</li> <li>• 'Peer to peer' networking across multiple sectors to facilitate sharing of best practice and knowledge</li> <li>• Further support around digital transformation and digital innovation</li> <li>• Skills development support through the SME Skills Brokerage Service (insert cross reference)</li> <li>• Decarbonisation advice and sign-posting</li> </ul>	  
<p><b>IMPLEMENT A TARGETED APPROACH TO INWARD INVESTMENT, EXPORT AND TRADE TO UNLOCK NEW GROWTH AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use additional funding from the Department for International Trade for inward investment, export and trade activity. Using evidence from the International Market Prioritisation Study, build a programme of activity to <b>target and land new inward investment opportunities</b>, bringing new jobs to the region</li> <li>• Through WECA's Productivity Challenge programme, <b>pilot new approaches to increasing export activity</b>, particularly for SMEs currently disengaged and in areas of identified opportunity</li> </ul>	  
<p><b>DRIVE JOB CREATION THROUGH SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT IN NEW REGIONAL INNOVATION PROJECTS, TO CREATIVELY ADDRESS GLOBAL CHALLENGES SUCH AS THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY, HEALTH AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY</b></p>	
<p><b>Secure additional support to accelerate and build upon funding-ready R&amp;D infrastructure projects, to help deliver solutions to real-world challenges, driving resilience, recovery and renewal. Funding-ready projects include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ground-breaking Digital Engineering and Technology (DETI) programme, which includes major new digital skills investments</li> <li>• The UMBrella (Urban Multi Wireless Broadband and IoT Testing for Local Authority and Industrial Applications) scheme, creating an Open Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) research and development testbed by joining key research and economic growth locations – a key enabler of DETI</li> <li>• Our emerging major skills and innovation centre – iSTART</li> <li>• Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus, delivery of which is a key component of the regeneration of this area of Bristol</li> <li>• Expansion of the Junction 21 Enterprise Area including The Foodworks SW and new Food Enterprise Zone</li> <li>• Exploring development of a regional Modern Methods of Construction Centre</li> <li>• Developing additional laboratory space to support growth and development of science based start-ups and high growth businesses, including through Unit DY and Future Space</li> </ul> <p><b>Drive forward existing and new collaborative interventions for funding to help the region's key sectors adapt and thrive.</b> The sectors identified in the Local Industrial Strategy as the region's strength factors continue to provide competitive advantage where the West of England can lead the world in key industries, technologies and ideas. Examples of advanced current and pipeline collaborations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future of Flight – a R&amp;D projects to support innovation in the future of flight (including low carbon)</li> <li>• 5G Create (Logistics) – showing how 5G capabilities and capacity can help deliver and enhance the potential Freeport concept as well as improve logistics management to improve air quality</li> <li>• Made Smarter – focusing on the digitisation of the manufacturing supply chain</li> <li>• <b>My World</b> – creating a globally unique proposition for screen-based media</li> </ul>	  



# Actions: Get residents back into jobs

## What is our ambition?

Getting residents back into jobs which pay above the Real Living Wage and offer security of employment, through targeted training and brokerage to available opportunities.

## What are the key issues, challenge and opportunities?

Issues and Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rising unemployment and redundancies</li> <li>• Younger and older workers, as well as those already at a disadvantage, hardest hit</li> <li>• Risk of widening inequalities</li> <li>• Loss/reduction in informal and formal childcare and challenges for carers more widely</li> <li>• Loss of apprenticeship opportunities</li> <li>• Rapid increase in need for digital skills at all levels</li> <li>• Complex employment and skills support landscape, creating confusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand for skills and vacancies in some parts of the economy (digital, green, construction, health and social care)</li> <li>• Rapid innovation in skills provision (online/blended models)</li> <li>• Upskills the workforce to respond to future of work challenges such as digitisation, automation and AI and wider STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths) skills</li> </ul>

## What is already being done to get residents back into jobs?

The West of England has one of the most highly skilled workforces in the country. Skills and training are at the core of our economic recovery. Whether that's helping residents keep their jobs, find new opportunities or join the workforce for the first time. WECA developed the region's employment and skills plan and is bringing partners together to ensure that residents can get the skills and training they need for our region's businesses. Devolution means that WECA can use the region's Adult Education Budget to ensure that adult skills provision meets the needs of our learners and our businesses. We have already taken a number of actions to help residents get back to work as part of our crisis response. This has included:

- Ensuring the continued delivery of the Adult Education Budget to help adults over the age of 19 to develop the skills and qualifications they need for life, work, apprenticeships and further

learning, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged

- Expanding **Future Bright** to reach people affected by the pandemic, which offers FREE career coaching, training and support to help people develop the skills and confidence they need to take their next step
- Re-framed and launched the £8m **Workforce for the Future** project to engage SMEs with skills/training brokerage and skills planning – focusing on sectors, groups or places where the Covid-19 impact has been higher
- Adapting and expanding the **West of England Careers Hub** to help young people plan their careers
- Supporting the development of **iSTART**, an innovative digital skills programme aiming to support people from diverse social and educational backgrounds to gain new skills leading to high quality jobs in the creative and digital sectors

## Actions: Get residents back into jobs continued

We are also working closely with Government and partners in the region to maximise the regional impact of national initiatives such as the **'Plan for Jobs'** and lead a co-ordinated regional response to **'Kickstart'** and **'Sector Based Work Academies'** to ensure it is complementary with our regional initiatives.

Most significantly, we have set up a Redundancy Response Initiative to deliver targeted support to businesses at risk of, or making, redundancies.

### Redundancy response and talent retention platform

The Redundancy Response Initiative has been formed to deliver targeted support initiatives to businesses at risk of, or making, redundancies. The group is coordinated by the West of England Combined Authority and includes the local councils, Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), National Careers Service (Adviza), Serco, Western Training Provider Network (WTPN), South West Trade Union Councils (SWTUC), Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) and Business West.

Through the **West of England Growth Hub** businesses of all types can access free information and guidance on managing workforce pressures to avoid or minimise redundancies. Advice is also provided to support employees through the redundancy process and help people to secure alternative employment or training. Businesses of any size in the West of England can access the support that includes workforce planning, HR advice and guidance, employability support, training and skills development and coaching.

We are also developing a Talent Retention Platform for the region, to help redeploy people into alternative employment and training and enabling businesses to source talent.

### Adult Education Budget

WECA has devolved responsibility for the **Adult Education Budget (AEB)**, amounting to £15m per annum to help adults over the age of 19 to develop the skills and qualifications needed for life, work, apprenticeships and further learning. AEB will continue to provide the underpinning foundational skills needed by residents to access regional opportunities, particularly considering increased need, as unemployment rates rise. With our support, AEB providers have already undertaken extraordinary work to ensure that delivery was able to continue as fully as possible during the lockdown and are now working on plans to enable a full return to learning in September. We have also begun to secure some additional resource from Government – funding for high value qualifications and **Sector Based Work Academies** – and will deploy this accordingly as part of the overall recovery effort.



## What are we going to do next to get residents back into jobs?

We will co-design and work with partners to put in place three strategic programmes detailed below:

### Strategic programmes

<p><b>REDUNDANCY RESPONSE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will further enhance the <b>Redundancy Response initiative</b> which provides support to businesses experiencing large-scale redundancies, by developing a <b>B2B Talent Retention Platform</b> to help re-deploy workers to employers which have vacancies</li> <li>• In the medium term this will develop into a regional <b>Employment and Skills Opportunities Portal</b> providing:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– A 'one front door' approach to skills development with diagnostic and signposting support.</li> <li>– An SME skills brokerage service to help SMEs retain and upskill their workforce (funded through WECA's Workforce for the Future Project)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	 
<p><b>RAMP UP RE-TRAINING LINKED WITH NEW PACKAGES DEVELOPED AND DEPLOYED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH RECRUITING EMPLOYERS AND ALIGNED WITH GROWTH AREAS (INCLUDING LOW CARBON AND DIGITAL)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With our partners in the region (including further and higher education and the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector), we will develop a comprehensive and accessible <b>package of training and re-training opportunities</b> aligned with real job opportunities from employers as well as future growth areas including:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Digital skills (basic through to higher level)</li> <li>– Green skills</li> <li>– Construction skills</li> <li>– Logistics</li> <li>– Health and social care (including voluntary, community and social enterprise)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>These programmes will be co-developed with employers where there is a clearly identified sectoral need, in order to develop training programmes that align with industry need and opportunities available. This will be closely aligned with the government's '<b>sector based work academies</b>' as well as our all age access hub and inward investment activity to ensure training is linked to real job opportunities.</p>	   
<p><b>ADDRESS YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT THROUGH DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL APPRENTICESHIP SUPPORT SERVICE AND EXPANSION OF SECTOR-BASED APPROACHES TO NURTURE YOUNG TALENT FROM UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use Workforce for the Future to             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop a bespoke Regional Apprenticeship Support service to maximise take-up and completion of apprentices including an apprenticeship communication strategy</li> <li>– Expand Sector Based Approaches (eg Creative Workforce for the Future) to nurture young talent from under-represented groups</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In the medium term, we will pilot Regional pooling of unspent levy funds to widen participation in apprenticeships amongst disadvantaged groups and specific cohorts</li> <li>• Delivery of Reboot West, a programme to support young people leaving care into work and training</li> </ul>	

# Actions: Strengthening inclusion

## What is our ambition?

Whilst our short term ambition must be to prevent further widening of inequalities, in the longer term our ambition is to build an inclusive economy where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential and pre-existing inequality gaps are reduced.

## What are the key issues, challenge and opportunities?

Issues and Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disadvantaged communities hardest hit –exacerbating pre-existing inequalities</li> <li>Pre-existing unemployed no further away from the labour market</li> <li>Loss/reduction in all types of childcare and challenges for all carers</li> <li>Increased digital exclusion (including rural communities)</li> <li>Voluntary, community and social enterprise sector threatened by loss of income streams as well as increased demand</li> <li>Information about support packages not reaching all communities</li> <li>Increasing mental health problems in and out of work</li> <li>Increase in number of young people that are not in education, employment or training (NEET)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth in volunteering stimulated by the pandemic</li> <li>To use voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to deliver support to targeted communities, building on their expertise</li> <li>Higher levels of entrepreneurship amongst Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups (BAME) and migrant communities<sup>1</sup>, provides opportunity for inclusive recovery. Women, younger people and BAME groups are motivated by ‘creating meaning’ as well as making money when starting a business<sup>2</sup>, providing an opportunity for a growth in social enterprise.</li> <li>Participatory cultural activities</li> </ul>

## What is already being done to strengthen inclusion?

Inclusive growth is at the heart of the West of England’s strategic ambition, forming a key pillar of the Local Industrial Strategy and associated Employment and Skills Plan. As such, pre-pandemic, there were a number of projects underway aiming to address the challenges faced by excluded groups. These included:

- **Future Bright** (all)
- Mentoring for Growth (all)
- Women into Digital Jobs, Education and Training (WIDJET) (women)
- Thrive West (disabled people/mental health)
- Get well, get on (disabled people/mental health)
- Apprentice Hub West (young people)
- Realising Talent (young people)
- Stepping Up (BAME/Disabled people/Women/LGBT)
- West of England works (BAME/young people/disabled people/ex-offenders/carers)
- Achieving Aspirations (Young people/care leavers)

1 <https://www2.aston.ac.uk/news/releases/2018/july/immigrants-twice-as-entrepreneurial-as-white-britons>  
 2 <https://www2.aston.ac.uk/news/releases/2018/july/immigrants-twice-as-entrepreneurial-as-white-britons>

Where appropriate, these projects have been re-orientated to respond to the changing circumstances due to Covid-19.

### Expanded Future Bright

**Future Bright** offers free career coaching, training and support to help people develop the skills and confidence they need to take their next step. Future Bright provides dedicated careers coaches who provide support by creating a personalised action plan.

The eligibility criteria for the Future Bright initiative has been expanded allowing dedicated 1:1 coaching support for people who have been impacted by Covid-19:

- Been made redundant or laid-off
- Are at risk of redundancy
- Have had their hours significantly reduced, and therefore have a reduced income
- Are self-employed and whose income or ability to earn has been severely impacted
- Are furloughed employees, if their reduced income means they are eligible for Universal Credit

The West of England Combined Authority provided **£3.6m** so that the scheme can continue for an additional 3 years from January 2021. Sign-ups under the Covid-19 criteria are over 30% of the current referrals into the Future Bright. The Future Bright offer forms part of the rapid redundancy response for business and can be contacted via the teams embedded in our councils.



## What are we going to do next to strengthen inclusion?

As a cross-cutting theme and a priority for the region, many of the proposals highlighted in this recovery plan contribute to the objective of strengthening inclusion, particularly those highlighted under 'Getting residents back to work', which are open to all, but will target groups and communities hardest hit by the pandemic. Equally, we have considered how initiatives to support a green recovery also contribute to inclusive growth – for example, our plans to decarbonise our transport infrastructure include action to help us become a leader in accessible public transport by putting in place the mechanisms to better understand the needs of the least able.

The actions highlighted in this chapter represent specific initiatives which have a particular focus on strengthening inclusion. In the short-term and using existing capacity we will:

- **Maximise delivery of the Realising Talent pre-NEETs project**, to ensure provision is closely co-ordinated with Government investment to ensure young people at risk are identified early and supported into further learning, training or work
- Flex our Adult Education Budget to **increase access to and take-up of basic digital skills** by the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups
- Use our convening powers to set up a **Regional Childcare Response Group** to monitor the childcare situation across the area, identifying gaps as they emerge and work to develop solutions
- Use our convening powers to **co-design and implement an inclusive communication model** to raise awareness of national, regional and local support initiatives and public information to improve the flow of accurate and timely information to all members of our community.

## Actions: Strengthening inclusion continued

This could help to:

- Manage the health risks associated with the pandemic by ensuring everybody is aware of the latest advice and guidance
- Improve take-up of national and regional support initiatives, ensuring everybody is able to benefit from schemes which they are eligible for
- Improve confidence in local services and amenities by communicating how services have been made Covid-19 secure.

Alongside this, we will co-design and work with partners to put in place three strategic programmes which are specifically targeted to 'Strengthen Inclusion':

### Strategic programmes

<p><b>Strengthen engagement to help under-represented groups access skills, enterprise and business support through a network of community champions.</b> New programmes will be introduced to ensure skills and enterprise support is targeted at priority neighbourhoods/groups across the region's diverse urban and rural communities which face a plethora of socio-economic barriers to accessing support. This will identify a network of champions to work with the Growth Hub in an action-based learning method, which continually informs the delivery of existing and new interventions.</p>	
<p><b>Fast-track the development of the community grant scheme</b> set out in the region's Employment and Skills Plan, to find new innovative methods to help disadvantaged communities and groups access employment and skills support, building capacity for recovery and resilience. This could include participatory cultural activities, which could be delivered by creative freelancers.</p>	
<p><b>Creating opportunities for 'Better Employment':</b> Creating good, accessible jobs which are paid at least the Real Living Wage, through a mixture of linked supply and demand side measures. These will build on existing initiatives such as Workforce for the Future and include the development of a 'Good Employer Standard' supported by a network of anchor institutions across the region leading the way.</p>	



# Actions: Supporting a green recovery

## What is our ambition?

To use the changes in behaviour brought about by the pandemic to accelerate our transition to net zero carbon.

## What are the key issues, challenge and opportunities?

Issues and Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy use reduced during lockdown due to reductions in travel and activity, but shifted to the home, highlighting importance of home energy efficiency</li> <li>• The region has high numbers of low efficiency housing</li> <li>• Risk that benefits will re-bounce as the economy re-starts</li> <li>• Risk of long-term damage to public transport due to low public confidence and Government advice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of cycling and walking have increased, car trips have reduced as more people have worked at home and air quality has improved. But the number of car trips are bouncing back as lock down restrictions are eased</li> <li>• Lockdown measures reduced electricity demand by at least 15%</li> <li>• A return of nature to our streets, garden and woodlands which has increased public support for a more bio-diverse future</li> <li>• Government is investing up to £40m in a Green Recovery Challenge Fund</li> <li>• Growing 'green economy' and low carbon market growing faster than wider economy</li> <li>• National £3bn market stimulation initiatives including the National Home Retrofit Package</li> <li>• Existing R&amp;D/innovation platforms which stimulate the design and manufacture of low carbon goods and services present in region</li> <li>• Demonstration projects including Future of Flight, Future Transport Zone and Made Smarter</li> </ul>

## Actions:

### Supporting a green recovery continued

#### What is already being done to support a green recovery?

There is a huge amount of work going on to reduce carbon emissions in our region already. WECA has committed significant investment to innovation, low carbon public transport, walking and cycling, renewable energy generation and supporting businesses to transition to low carbon ways of doing things. This includes:

- Investing £5m in the new **Digital Engineering Technology and Innovation (DETI)** project – this will reduce carbon emissions by developing better products that are lighter, more fuel efficient and have less waste
- £10 million investment in the **Institute for Advanced Automotive Propulsion Systems (IAAPS)** global centre of excellence developing ultra-low and zero emission vehicles
- Our £1.7m **West of England Low Carbon Challenge Fund** – supporting small and medium-sized businesses to improve their energy efficiency through the **Green Business Grant**, and increasing innovative renewable energy generation in the region to deliver community benefits through the **Local Energy** scheme.
- Development of the **West of England Energy Strategy**, which is already taking steps towards the decarbonisation of the energy system. In addition, WECA hosts the **South West Energy Hub** which is helping to identify, develop and implement local renewable energy projects.
- The **Joint Green Infrastructure Strategy** is already taking a significant step towards developing, protecting and enhancing green infrastructure
- The recently adopted West of England Bus Strategy sets out our pre-covid objective of doubling passenger numbers to meet our goal of carbon neutrality

In terms of transport, WECA as the Transport Authority have worked with transport providers to ensure key workers could get to their place of work safely through measures which kept the buses running, communicated travel advice and implemented temporary measures such as temporary cycle lanes and wider pavements.

Alongside our recovery plans we are also developing our climate emergency action plan. These two pieces of work align and are mutually reinforcing. It is about supporting our climate emergency goal alongside securing our economic future following the Covid-19 outbreak. Through the recovery plan and the Climate Emergency Action Plan we can better integrate low-carbon solutions in a way that boosts growth and puts the region on a firm long-term net-zero carbon footing.

#### What are we going to do next to support a green recovery?

In the short term and using existing capacity we will:

- Use the South West Energy Hub (hosted by WECA) and the Local Energy Scheme, to identify and develop business plans for local renewable energy projects in order to secure investment through a range of Government funding initiatives including the £1bn **public sector and social housing decarbonisation scheme** and future investment as part of plans to 'Get Britain Building' post Covid.
- Maximise the region's share of the **Green Recovery Challenge Fund** by supporting regional charities and agencies to access the funding, as well as exploring the potential to create a mechanism for local businesses to invest in charities that are developing, protecting and enhancing nature in the region.

Alongside this, we will put in place three strategic programmes to support a green recovery:

## Strategic programmes

<p><b>MAXIMISE THE REGION'S SHARE OF NATIONAL GREEN STIMULUS PACKAGES</b></p> <p>By undertaking preparatory work to better understand the local building retrofit market including an assessment of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the local buildings retrofit market and barriers to growth</li> <li>• the local skills market and development needs to ensure local people have skills to deliver high quality retrofit and the next generation of zero carbon homes. Delivered through 'Getting Residents back to work'</li> <li>• Best practice interventions to support start-up and growth and supply chain development</li> </ul>	   
<p><b>EXPAND THE LOW CARBON CHALLENGE FUND AND GREEN BUSINESS GRANTS</b></p> <p>The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funded Low Carbon Challenge Fund and Green Business Grant Scheme already supports SMEs to improve their energy efficiency through the <b>Green Business Grant</b>, and increasing innovative renewable energy generation in the region to deliver community benefits through the <b>Local Energy</b> scheme. In order to support more businesses to grow in a sustainable way, we will seek resources to expand the scheme by £1.895m. By expanding an existing scheme, we can rapidly scale-up support, allowing resources to be deployed quickly.</p>	 
<p><b>MAKE INVESTMENTS TO DECARBONISE OUR TRANSPORT SYSTEM</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build on the temporary measures put in place during lock down by investing a <b>further £10m in longer term cycling and walking solutions</b> to improve air quality, physical and mental health and reduce congestion</li> <li>• <b>Implement our long term £350m investment strategy</b> which includes:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Extensions and improvements to the <b>metrobus network</b>, connecting residents to job opportunities, improving connections with the Park and Ride as well as making it easier for people to change from one form of transport to another</li> <li>– <b>Increase rail travel</b> to generate over 1 million new rail journeys and give 80,000 people access to train services</li> <li>– Capturing the changes in travel that coronavirus has brought by investing £411m in walking and cycling routes over the next 16 years, focussing on 30 local high streets as well as improvements along 55 continuous cycle routes</li> <li>– Investigating the costs and benefits of developing a <b>new mass transit system</b> that will revolutionise the way we move around the area, dramatically improving congestion and air quality while reducing our carbon emissions</li> <li>– Developing a <b>Future Transport Zone</b> proposal which uses smart transport and technology to better manage our network as well as improving the user experience. A trial of e-scooters is one of the first projects that will offer a new way to travel around our region benefitting our residents, our environment and our economy. This is being fast tracked following the coronavirus outbreak.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Alongside these significant investments in transport, we will take steps to ensure that we become a <b>leader in low carbon accessible transport</b>, by designing a system that works for the least able. To do this we will set up a <b>public transport user panel</b> to guide both operational and strategic planning considerations as well as create a set of <b>accessibility standards</b> which will be assessed by 'quality checkers'<sup>3</sup></p>	  

3 <http://qualitycheckers.org.uk/home>



## Actions: Renewing places

### What is our ambition?

Use the disruption and changes of behaviour brought about by the pandemic 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.

### What are the key issues, challenge and opportunities?

Issues and Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massive fall in footfall in towns, shopping centres, high streets and city centres – which could trigger a spiral of decline</li> <li>• Tourism and cultural businesses have been hardest hit and some still not able to re-open or reopen sustainably</li> <li>• Threat to cultural ecology and attractiveness of region as place to live and work, if creative and cultural businesses close</li> <li>• Potential reduction in demand for workspace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A strong history of culture-led place making</li> <li>• Increasing use of outdoor space by hospitality sector</li> <li>• The mix of urban, rural and coastal areas and range of cultural activities which providing an exceptionally diverse cultural ecology</li> <li>• A heightened public interest in green infrastructure</li> <li>• To create jobs through investment in infrastructure and affordable housing</li> <li>• To re-think our approach to place, using urban centres differently</li> <li>• To build a consensual approach to place-making through the Spatial Development Strategy, with our communities</li> </ul>

### What is already being done to renew places?

The West of England is a vibrant, diverse and creative region, which includes the thriving cities of Bristol and Bath as well as diverse towns, rural and coastal communities. It is our diversity which makes us special and attracts millions of visitors a year. We have a strong commitment to the creation of sustainable thriving places across the region and prior to the pandemic have been working with partners to:

- Support our high streets with a £10m **Love our High Streets Fund** to pilot innovative ways to transform our high streets and town centres
- Work with Arts Council England to develop a **Regional Cultural Strategy** and establish a **Regional Cultural Compact** to oversee its delivery.
- Started work on a new **Spatial Development Strategy** for the region

In response to the **Tourism Sector Deal**, Destination Bristol and Visit Bath, which currently represent around 900 business members and three local authorities, have proposed a new Destination Management Organisation that will represent the region, providing effective B2B services including a regional convention bureau, single membership scheme and pro-active travel trade engagement, while maintaining the individual Visit Bath and Visit Bristol brands providing strong consumer facing brands and digital platforms from which to launch tactical campaigns and host content.

## What are we going to do next to renew places?

In the short term and using existing capacity we will:

- **Revisit the draft Cultural Strategy and Cultural Compact** in the autumn to ensure we take every opportunity for culture to thrive and to support the implementation of our recovery plans. The Cultural Strategy and Cultural Compact work is part funded by Arts Council England who are fully supportive of our proposals to move this work forwards.
- **Undertake a review of workspaces/hubs to understand the impact of Covid-19 and propose remedial action** – the review will also identify where there are opportunities to expand so-called 'grow-on' facilities to capture new sectoral growth across the region's diverse urban and rural areas, making the case to government for additional capital funding where the need for public intervention is well evidenced.
- **Providing a single source of Information, Advice and Guidance, that builds on and shares best practice and innovative approaches to support a green reopening.** This will include building on existing best practice to make outdoor spaces safe, attractive and sustainable through Autumn and Winter and promotion of local supply chains, reducing supply chain miles and reversing the current trend for disposables.
- **As part of the Community Grant Scheme, explore opportunities to establish a community recovery programme.** A programme working closely with communities to deliver a series of creative activities to reinvigorate public places, encouraging inclusive participation and engagement as well as building confidence to return. This programme would engage with the freelance community, which has been particularly hit, to deliver.
- **Build a consensual approach to spatial planning, high quality design and place-making** through the Spatial Development Strategy development process. This will involve:
  - establishing an open dialogue with the Homebuilders Federation, housebuilders, housing associations, community groups and other stakeholders around a commitment to strategic plan-making and high-quality design and placemaking standards.
  - master-planning areas of emerging growth and regeneration with high quality design part of the development principles.

Alongside this, we will co-design and work with partners to put in place three strategic programmes to renew places:

# Actions: Renewing places continued

## Strategic programmes

<p><b>SECURING INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure <b>investment in infrastructure and affordable housing</b> to maintain momentum in the construction sector and achieve our strategic place-making and decarbonisation objectives, as well as providing jobs for our local workforce. This could include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– establishing the delivery pipeline, and working with Homes England and delivery partners to get a funding plan in place, possibly via devolved funding settlement</li> <li>– establishing an increased and accelerated affordable housing programme to address the expected increase in need</li> <li>– potential use of Mayoral Development Corporations (MDCs) to deliver sites with complex land ownership and/or infrastructure issues</li> <li>– establishing a skills development pipeline that aligned with the needs of the delivery pipeline. Delivered through 'Getting Residents back to work'</li> <li>– establishing a pipeline that will provide the level of certainty to make off-site manufacturing feasible, coordinated and/or driven by the public sector/Homes England, possibly over wider geography</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	   
<p><b>RE-IMAGINING AND RE-INVIGORATING OUR TOWNS AND CITY CENTRES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a new and <b>innovative town centre re-structuring programme</b> to revitalise the hardest hit areas, building on the renewed importance of local neighbourhoods and a greater awareness of 'local liveability' or the '15 minute city concept'. i.e. where you have everything you need to live your life within a 15 minute walking or cycling radius of your home, including employment opportunities, local shops and restaurants, leisure and cultural activities, green and even blue infrastructure.</li> <li><b>Develop a Regional Tourism Zone to rebuild domestic and inbound tourism and further strengthen our position as a destination of choice for inward investment:</b> We will revisit our previous work on regional tourism initiatives to develop a case for further investment into our region, supporting the new destination management organisation to develop a regional tourism zone proposal that would focus on addressing some of the barriers we have identified and building on our previous success with the 5G smart tourism pilot project.</li> </ul>	    
<p><b>ESTABLISH A CULTURAL, CREATIVE AND DIGITAL DEVELOPMENT FUND</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A new West of England Cultural, Creative &amp; Digital Development Fund would help these thriving sectors of our economy, significantly impacted by Covid-19, to adapt and innovate in response to changed consumer and visitor demand, helping reinvigorate and renew places (including struggling city and town centres). Funding could support a number of capital projects across the area.</li> </ul>	  

# Delivery and next steps

## Collective action

There will be collective responsibility for delivering and resourcing actions identified in this plan. The scale of challenge means that we will need to work collaboratively in partnership with both regional partners as well as across Government departments to maximise our impact. This means working with partners from across the public, private education and voluntary sectors to co-design and co-deliver the interventions highlighted here as well as complementary actions being taken forward by others.

## Using the resources we have

Since the start of the crisis, partners across the region have adapted and refocused existing initiatives to:

- ensure projects continue to deliver support to individuals and businesses in a COVID secure way
- ensure activity delivers against our recovery objectives and meets the new needs of end users

Full details of our existing activity can be found here: **Business Support, Employment and Skills, Transport**

As part of our existing £350m investment programme to drive economic growth across a range of business, skills and infrastructure projects, in June the WECA committee agreed £5m to help kick-start the early work of the taskforce and short term priorities identified in this plan.

## Securing additional investment

Alongside other Combined Authorities, we are making the case to Government for long-term, devolved funding to allow us to achieve our ambitions and deliver sustained growth for UK Plc.

Our priorities submitted to Government for the 2020 Comprehensive Spending Review Submission reiterate this position, highlighting the need for long-term, flexible, devolved funding to deliver on both our long-term regional ambitions and our immediate recovery plans.

As well as securing direct investment from Government into the Combined Authority, we recognise the value to the region of partnership bids. We already work closely with partners in the public, private, education and voluntary sectors to secure external investment for projects that align with our regional ambitions and this will continue.

## What next?

However, there is much still to be done in considering our long term response. Whilst the pandemic has caused massive changes in behaviour and accelerated trends such as home working and digitisation, the extent to which these changes will be permanent is not yet clear. Therefore the taskforce will continue to work through some of the more complex and challenging long term issues and further strategic action may be brought forward in due course or taken forward through other strategic plans.

# What will be the impact?

## What will we achieve?

Delivering the proposals in this plan will give the region a strong foundation for recovery. Our current plans will deliver the outcomes below by 2025, and we will continue to drive up the impact of our action as we develop the proposals. WECA is investing over £500m up to 2025 to support the region's recovery and economic development, in line with this plan and the local industrial strategy.

	<p><b>Rebuilding business</b></p> <p>Over 11,200 businesses supported to adapt their operations, boost staff skills, and innovate                  £90m planned investment in innovation facilities and research and development projects, and a pipeline of new projects of £300m+</p>
	<p><b>Getting residents back into jobs</b></p> <p>1,800+ jobs created, plus 750 construction jobs a year across our investments                  22,000+ training and skills placements each year</p>
	<p><b>Strengthening inclusion</b></p> <p>Support residents to access good, secure jobs                  Deliver careers advice to 95 schools and colleges                  10,000 people take online mental health at work course                  Widen community access to business and skills support</p>
	<p><b>Supporting a green recovery</b></p> <p>Support retrofit of homes                  1m new rail journeys, and walking and cycling transformed in 30 high streets                  60 new low carbon business grants</p>
	<p><b>Renewing places</b></p> <p>£320m+ invested in the region's transport and housing by 2023                  Spatial Development Strategy established through consensual approach                  Publish Cultural Strategy &amp; establish Cultural Compact                  Strategies in place for the town and city centres most vulnerable to changing movement and shopping patterns</p>

# Appendix 1: How the plan has been developed

## The West of England Recovery Taskforce

Led by Regional Mayor, Tim Bowles, the Recovery Taskforce is a partnership between the West of England Combined Authority, the Local Enterprise Partnership, business, universities and the region's councils. Membership details can be found [here](#):

The role of the task force is to:

- Putting together a recovery plan, which will include measures to help businesses adapt to the new economic landscape and improve resilience, as well as support for residents to develop new skills, training and employment opportunities.
- Looking at the impact of the government's economic measures on businesses and communities, identifying where additional support is needed.
- Feeding back to government, lobbying to ensure the West of England has what it needs for economic recovery; advising and supporting a managed exit from lockdown arrangements, identifying the next stages of financial support needed.
- Making sure the West of England has the right public transport, physical and digital infrastructure. WECA is already working with bus and rail companies to ensure key workers can get to work. This work with public transport partners will continue, to ensure they continue to operate as we move into recovery.

The task force met monthly from May to October.

## Gathering evidence and intelligence

The Recovery Plan has been informed by a robust economic intelligence gathering which has included monitoring of key economic indicators as well as qualitative information from our Growth Hub business engagements, nine sector groups, as well as the Regional Business Insight Panel and Skills Advisory Board. A regular economic briefing is available on our [website](#).

## Consultation with wider stakeholders

In addition, representatives from a range of community groups and organisations working to support disadvantaged groups and communities were consulted through a series of telephone interviews and a workshop to discuss the draft strategy.

We will further engage with our stakeholders and members of the public on the next stages of our regional recovery.

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 **WEST OF  
ENGLAND**  
Combined Authority