

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20 January 2022

Update on Mayoral Priorities and Plans

Purpose of Report

To provide OSC Members with an update on key priorities that the Mayor has set with the Executive Team for the remainder of his term where activity is underway.

1. COVID-19

With record breaking numbers of cases, leading to record numbers of people needing to isolate COVID continues to impact on our daily lives. Whilst the emerging evidence appears to present encouraging news that Omicron provides a milder form of the disease, the pressures on the NHS are extraordinarily challenging.

Working with partners across South Yorkshire, the Mayor continues to closely monitor the developing situation. The rapid rise in hospitalisations in late December and early January across South Yorkshire has been particularly concerning, especially when combined with the high levels of staff absences impacting all sectors of the economy, including public transport.

The Executive Team continues to support the Mayor in liaising closely with the Chair of the South Yorkshire ICS and Local Resilience Forum monitoring and reviewing data; and in continuing to make the case into government for further support measures for businesses affected by COVID, given the impact of Omicron.

2. Follow up to publication of the Integrated Rail Plan

In November the much anticipated and long-awaited Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) was published by the Government, which proved to be woefully inadequate, badly letting down South Yorkshire.

The Mayor continues to make representations into government, pressing for progression and agreement of programme packages that will deliver benefits for people, places, communities and businesses across South Yorkshire, including:

- ‘early win’ schemes that are already in forward programmes or not dependent on the IRP, such as confirmation of the third fast train per hour to Manchester resulting from the already committed Hope Valley Line upgrade;
- interventions that were identified in the IRP, but without specific commitments, such as Midland Mainline Electrification; and
- has responded to the Manchester Recovery Task Force consultation on passenger services operating between Manchester Piccadilly and Sheffield, stressing the importance of maintaining a regular direct link between South Yorkshire and Manchester Airport.

These packages do not replace our longer term ambitions for improved connectivity to our neighbouring city regions and the rest of the UK that were encompassed in the HS2 and NPR proposals that were not prioritised in the IRP, and which are still required for South Yorkshire.

3. **Forthcoming Levelling up White Paper and Fighting for South Yorkshire’s fair share of the Shared Prosperity Fund**

The IRP provides an extremely concerning backdrop to the other delayed policy document from Government, **the Levelling Up White Paper** (formerly the Devolution White Paper). As its flagship policy, credible ideas and policies are needed to effectively begin to tackle regional inequality. Particularly as COVID has shone such a spotlight on the scale of inequalities facing our country.

Transformative policy will need a transformative level of investment to deliver it. So, a significant increase in funding seems critical to success.

The Mayor continues to make the case into government for greater devolution of resources and decision-making to local leaders and metro mayors to deliver the practical changes communities need to thrive – although it’s not at all clear whether the Government has either the ambition or the appetite to do this.

The allocation of **the Shared Prosperity Fund** is a key opportunity for Government to make tangible progress on levelling up, by investing in those communities that need it the most. With South Yorkshire council leaders and local MPs, the Mayor wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to demand that South Yorkshire receive its fair share of this fund for regeneration and economic growth.

Given the region’s credible and well received Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for a stronger, greener and fairer economy, the Mayor is arguing that government should extend its commitment for increased funding, including South Yorkshire.

4. **Strengthening Relationships with India**

In December the Mayor met with the High Commissioner of India to the UK, Ms Gaitri Issar Kumar, to further strengthen the business relationship between India and South Yorkshire.

India is central to the South Yorkshire MCA's trade and investment strategy. Given shared strengths in advanced manufacturing, healthcare technologies and digitisation, as well as in sustainable fuel and clean energy solutions, there is huge potential for growth. These specialisms offer great opportunities for both the Maharashtra region of India and South Yorkshire to trade more closely.

The Executive's Business Investment Team continues to forge strong relationships with India and this latest meeting was important in securing the High Commissioner to the UK's support in a proposed trade mission to India later this year.

The meeting follows a number of activities between South Yorkshire and the Maharashtra region of India, which recently saw SYMCA run a Round Table event, which opened up new trading opportunities for both South Yorkshire and Indian businesses. In addition, the MCA has recently set up and run its first South Yorkshire India Advisory Board. This Board brings together Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Sheffield, our local research centres, local Chambers of Commerce, the DIT India and the Pune Chamber of Commerce. South Yorkshire MCA is also planning to hold an Investor Round Table in the new year, as well as an Ed Tech showcase.

5. Flooding: South Yorkshire Catchment Plan

Following the devastating 2019 floods, the Mayor and local leaders submitted a South Yorkshire Business and Infrastructure Resilience Priority Flood Programme to Government. Collectively this programme of 27 schemes that would protect over 10,300 homes and 2,800 businesses has been awarded £169m of Grant in Aid funding over the next six years from the Environment Agency's Medium Term Investment Plan, more than doubling investment in the region.

As part of this Priority Programme a catchment wide flood plan for the whole of South Yorkshire has been developed to provide an integrated approach to future flood policy and investment, covering all rivers and watercourses. This detailed plan aims to secure additional funding and investment to reduce flood risk to homes and businesses and improve the resilience of places to climate change and potential related future flooding.

Preparation of the Plan has been jointly overseen by the MCA Housing and Infrastructure Board and the South Yorkshire Flood Risk Partnership (SYFRP), and the MCA be asked to approve the final draft Plan at its January meeting. If approved, the Plan will be used to guide investment into flood mitigation measures and inform long-term strategy for flood risk management in South Yorkshire.