

September 2020**Mayor's Update****Purpose of Report**

To provide LEP Board Members with an update on key Mayoral activity relating to the economic agenda.

1. The COVID pandemic and adapting to our 'new normal'

In the five months since the country was put into lockdown to prevent the spread of coronavirus, we have made great sacrifices to protect the NHS and save lives.

As a result, shops, pubs, restaurants, gyms, cinemas and places of worship are now open, people are returning to offices and we can meet up with friends and family again. But we must not become complacent as a result. Coronavirus still poses a very real threat. Whilst rates in South Yorkshire are at the lowest levels since the early days of the pandemic, as we have seen in other places, they can rise again very rapidly.

We have just regained many aspects of normal life, including most recently our schools re-opening, and students are due to return to our region's colleges and universities later this month. Meanwhile preparations are underway for the St Leger festival in Doncaster, building on pilot events such as the World Snooker Championship in Sheffield. Such progress is essential as we create our 'new normal' whereby we learn to live with COVID and renew our economy. But there is a very long road to recovery ahead.

Getting the balance right between managing infection rates, whilst creating a more inclusive and sustainable future for our people, communities and businesses is key. But it will also be extremely complex. Continuously learning 'what works' and adapting as a consequence will continue to be essential over the weeks and months ahead.

Whilst the future remains uncertain, I'm continuing to work closely with our local authorities and anchor institutions to ensure that the region has the resources in place to plan for the best, by building back better, whilst also preparing for the worst of a second wave during the winter. Throughout all of this I am certain that the fortitude and community spirit that has characterised South Yorkshire's response so far will continue, as we face the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead together.

2. The South Yorkshire Devolution Deal now enshrined in law

On the 28th July the legislation needed to implement South Yorkshire's Devolution Deal came into force, having completed the requisite parliamentary process.

Securing the Deal marks a landmark moment for the region, equipping local leaders and myself with some of the tools and resources to begin to build back better from COVID. This includes the commitment of £30m of funding per annum for 30 years and the devolution of the Adult Education Budget from 2021/22.

3. Securing additional powers and resources to deliver our Renewal Action Plan and build back better

Whilst finalising the Deal was a landmark moment, devolution to the region remain a process, rather than an event. Our country remains one of the most centralised in the world and the need for a strong and collaborative relationship between national, sub-regional and local government has been brought to the fore through COVID. However, as with other areas across the North, the impacts of a decade of austerity on public services have made South Yorkshire's response to an already difficult situation even more complex.

For these reasons there is an ever-greater need for more powers and resources to be devolved to regions, bringing decisions much closer to the people they effect. This will be vital in realising the ambitions of our Renewal Action Plan (RAP) to deliver 55,000 jobs or training opportunities, support 25,000 businesses, create 3,000 apprenticeships and revitalise our urban centres. It will also require a proper and fair funding settlement for local government, given the instrumental role fulfilled by the sector delivering front line services to our communities, when they've needed them the most.

Throughout the Autumn the region will continue to make the case to secure these additional resources. The Local Recovery White Paper, Comprehensive Spending Review and Budget will represent critical milestones in this process. I will be looking for the Government to tangibly deliver on its levelling up, Northern Powerhouse agenda, given the disproportionate impacts that have been seen on our country's most deprived communities through COVID. As I have said before, this will require deeds and not just words, if we are to create a stronger, greener and fairer society.

4. Tree planting partnership

Over the summer I have formed a new partnership to plant trees and create more woodland across the region. Working with the South Yorkshire Local Nature Partnership and the Woodland Trust, we will produce and deliver a plan focused on realising our shared ambition – planting millions of trees and playing our part in growing the Northern Forest.

This work will form an important part of our commitment to tackle the climate crisis, protect our wildlife, and reduce the risk of more devastating floods like we saw last year. But it will also help our economy and create jobs at a time of massive economic disruption, give more people access to nature, and green our streets – improving the quality of life for our communities in ways big and small.

Through this partnership I want to empower community groups to identify sites, get trees in the ground, and make their neighbourhoods better, greener places to live.