

Local Enterprise Partnership

01 July 2021

Mayor's Update

Purpose of Report

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

1. COVID

Rising COVID infections and hospitalisations through the spread of the Delta variant in recent weeks, are extremely concerning trends. Whilst South Yorkshire has seen only moderate increase when compared to the national average, it reinforces the importance of the vaccination programme. I am extremely grateful for the herculean effort of all those involved in its phenomenally successful delivery and would urge everyone to get both doses of their vaccine as soon as they're invited to do so.

Whilst the need for a cautious approach is understood, it is essential that economic support stays in place for businesses and people effected by the pause in the easing of restrictions. Put simply, if restrictions remain, then support must remain too. That means no drop in furlough payments, no change to business rates relief and no lifting of the safeguards preventing evictions.

I continue to work with partners across our region to ensure that South Yorkshire has what it needs to respond to the pandemic and to create a stronger, greener and fairer renewal from it.

2. Plan for the North

The impacts of the pandemic have brought into ever starker focus the deep routed inequalities in our country. There is an urgent need to unlock the massive untapped potential of South Yorkshire and people, places, and communities across the North.

Whilst I welcome the Government's commitment to levelling up, I remain deeply concerned that so far, it's more slogan than substance, without even a definition of what they are trying to achieve. For this reason, Leaders from South Yorkshire and I commissioned a report in January from Professor Steve Fothergill and Dr Tony Gore, to help develop a plan for the North, setting out what's needed to deliver the levelling promised by Government. The [report](#) is an independent, professional assessment

with the view to getting the debate started. With the support of forty councils from across the North, it has now been sent to the Prime Minister.

Setting out what any levelling up effort must comprise to be taken seriously, it makes the case for a proper plan with measurable goals, and long-term, reliable investment on a scale that matches the transformative ambition the government claims it has. It is about power as well as money: local leaders and local communities must be in the driving seat, because no one knows our challenges like we do ourselves. Only when these basic elements are in place can we believe the government is sincere when it talks about levelling up – and so far, they are missing.

In South Yorkshire we cannot afford to wait for Government's plan to materialise. Instead, local Leaders and I are using our powers and funds to deliver real and tangible change. Set out below, is a summary of some of the actions that we have taken in recent weeks to deliver on these ambitions.

3. A greener South Yorkshire: Investing in our bus network

Local leaders and I are continuing to work hard on our commitment to achieve better buses for South Yorkshire. A critical issue for the region, its vital that we deliver an affordable, reliable and high-quality service that connects people to jobs, skills and opportunities across the region.

This is why we are already investing £6m in cheaper fares for young people and more than £3m to start work on better bus stops and our first electric buses.

But this is only the beginning of our plans. Currently funding for buses in London is £76 per head: in Sheffield it is £5 – this is unacceptable and unsustainable. We need proper investment in our bus service now.

For all of these reasons the Mayoral Combined Authority has focused its £50m bid into the Levelling Up Fund on a proposal to make improvements for passengers across South Yorkshire's bus and tram network. This includes:

- Updating bus and tram shelters across the region, with more live information displays;
- Replacing a fleet of community buses with electric vehicles;
- Bringing in contactless payment across South Yorkshire public transport;
- Installing payment machines within communities so you can buy tickets before travelling; and
- Road improvements in traffic hotspots to make bus journeys faster and more reliable journeys.

Better transport is one of the foundations on which we will build a better South Yorkshire. Local Leaders and I have huge ambitions for our buses, and the MCA is investing millions of pounds in making real, tangible improvements for passengers.

We need the government to match our ambitions, so we can get on and build the world class bus service South Yorkshire needs and deserves.

4. A fairer South Yorkshire : the launch of the Ownership Hub

On the 22nd June I was delighted to launch the Ownership Hub in South Yorkshire. The first of its kind in the country, the pilot programme will be run in collaboration with Coops UK and the Employee Ownership Association. The Hub is part of the #1MillionOwners campaign which aims to create 1 million employee and worker owners in the UK by 2030.

This is a hugely exciting opportunity. Not just because it gives the chance to boost our support for co-ops and employee ownership, but because it will help to weave the thread of co-operation through our plan for economic recovery and renewal in South Yorkshire.

It is an integral part of a greater effort to not just create a more dynamic, productive and resilient economy, but to reform its structure – to change the system in a way which makes it fairer, more inclusive, and better able to serve the aspirations and needs of the people of South Yorkshire.

It complements other threads of that vision – linking support for wider ownership to reformed procurement, incentives around investments in companies, the creation of a business charter, community wealth building, stronger devolution and democracy, and a just carbon transition.

5. A stronger South Yorkshire: continuing the workers' training programme

The Mayoral Combined Authority will provide the money to continue the Union Learning Fund in South Yorkshire for the next two years, after funding for the programme was cut by the government.

Established in 1998, the Union Learning Fund (ULF) helped workers gain the skills they need to progress into apprenticeships and higher-level learning.

The ULF works with 44,000 learning reps across a wide variety of sectors; including around 700 in South Yorkshire. Around 200,000 workers every year have been helped into learning by the ULF.

As part of the Skills Training Fund the government announced it would stop paying for the ULF from March 2021. This would have led to the closure of 12 Union Learning Centres in South Yorkshire, and the loss of hundreds of jobs.

The Mayoral Combined Authority has committed £170,000 to fund the service for the next two years. This will provide people with the chance to improve their lives and change their skill sets – at a time we need our workforce to meet the challenges of a post-Covid economy.