

Local Enterprise Partnership

13 January 2022

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-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, we continue to closely monitor the developing situation. The rapid rise in hospitalisations in the last week in our region and across Yorkshire and Humber and the North East is particularly concerning, especially when combined with the high levels of staff absences due to COVID.

The transformative impact of the vaccination programme is also clearly apparent in reducing the severity of this extremely infectious disease. I am hugely grateful for the truly herculean effort that has gone into its successful delivery, as well as those of our vital key workers on the front line of the most serious public health crisis any of us have faced.

I continue to make the case for government to put in place support measures for businesses affected by COVID, given the impact of Omicron. It's simply not right that business and individuals already suffering the effects of almost two years of disruption should have to endure what amounts to a soft lockdown in the critical run-up to Christmas without any support. I will continue to fight to ensure that people and businesses in South Yorkshire receive the support they need, including for those that need to isolate.

2. The publication of the Integrated Rail Plan and the forthcoming Levelling Up White Paper

In November the much anticipated and long-awaited Integrated Rail Plan (IRP) was published by the Government. Woefully inadequate, the plan badly let us down.

Not only has the IRP abandoned much needed and desperately overdue improvements to services for passengers, it squandered an opportunity to unlock thousands of jobs, massive new investment and the regeneration of our towns and stations across our region. After so many re-commitments and re-announcements, after so many promises of transformation, for Government to do this and to call it levelling up is simply treating people with contempt.

This was supposed to be the moment where the government began to put right years of neglect and underinvestment in the North, where our needs were finally put first or a change. Instead they locked in a second-class and second-rate solution for a generation. It's the same old story – when it comes to the crunch, once again the government is leaving us to make do with crumbs off the table.

Rather than levelling up South Yorkshire, this Prime Minister is holding our region back.

This 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 also need a transformative level of investment to deliver it. So, a significant increase in funding seems critical to success.

Of course, there is more to levelling up than money, for example, there should be greater devolution of decision-making to local leaders and mayors to deliver the practical changes our communities need to thrive. However, it's not at all clear whether the Government has either the ambition or the appetite to do this.

3. Fighting for South Yorkshire's fair share of the Shared Prosperity Fund

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, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to demand that South Yorkshire get its fair share of this fund for regeneration and economic growth.

From next year, South Yorkshire would have got hundreds of millions of pounds more from EU funding, had that still been in place. The Prime Minister promised places like South Yorkshire would not lose out after Brexit. We are asking him to keep his word.

I am not asking for special treatment for South Yorkshire, just that we get our fair share. To put this in context, recent analysis has shown the funding would equate to more than £900m in investment in South Yorkshire over seven years.

Articulated through our SEP, we have plans to build a stronger, greener and fairer economy, and we have proven we can deliver – we just need the right tools to do

the job. The government should extend its commitment to funding all regions who now meet the criteria for increased funding, including South Yorkshire.

4. Strengthening Relationships with India

Last month I met with the High Commissioner of India to the UK, Ms Gaitri Issar Kumar, to further strengthen the relationship between her country and South Yorkshire.

India is central to our trade and investment strategy. Given our 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.

As we continue to forge strong relationships with India, this latest meeting was important in securing the High Commissioner to the UK's support in our trade mission to India later this year. A very productive meeting, I really welcome the support of the High Commissioner and her office in making this a success for both South Yorkshire and India.

The meeting follows a number of activities between South Yorkshire and the Maharashtra region of India, which recently saw South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority run a Round Table event, which opened up new trading opportunities for both South Yorkshire and Indian businesses. In addition, South Yorkshire 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.