

INVESTMENT FUND GATEWAY 1

Locality Complementary Report



CONTENTS

1. CONTEXT	3
2. THE WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY	4
Case Study - Local Industrial Strategy Productivity Challenge	6
Case Study - Rail Programme	6
Case Study - Future Bright	6
3. THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT OF THE INVESTMENT FUND	7
Case Study – Workforce for the Future	8
4. ESTABLISHING THE INVESTMENT FUND	9
Case Study - Mass Transit	9
Investment Fund Criteria	11
5. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS	11
Assurance Framework	11
Investment Strategy	11
Case Study - Land Acquisiton Fund	12
6. DELIVERY	13
Case Study - Cribbs Patchway Cycle Links	14
Case Study - South Bristol Enterprise Support	14
7. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS	14
Portfolio Management	14
Programme Reporting	14
Project Reporting	15
Risk Management	15
Annual Business Plan	16
Delivery Models	16
Monitoring and Evaluation	16
8. FLEXIBILITIES OF THE INVESTMENT FUND	17
Case Study - Loving Our High Streets	
9. OUTLOOK FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS	19
Case Study - Digital Engineering Technology & Innovation (DETI)	19
Case Study - Bristol Temple Meads Eastern Entrance	19
Leading Resgional Response to Covid-19	19
Climate Emergency	20
Future Devolution	20
Summary	20

1. CONTEXT

As part of devolution, the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) was awarded £900m, that being £30m per year over 30 years, half as revenue and half as capital, which has been used to create the Investment Fund. This funding is subject to a 5-year gateway review process which is used to trigger the release of the next 5-year tranche of funding.

This report seeks to provide the wider context for the Independent Evaluation of Local Growth Interventions (Investment Fund) Final Report being produced for Government. It is intended that this document will sit alongside this report and does not seek to revisit aspects covered in detail through the Independent Evaluation.



2. THE WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY

WECA was established in 2017 and is made up of three of the councils in the region – Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol and South Gloucestershire. WECA also supports the Local Enterprise Partnership, which is business-led, and covers the four West of England councils, including North Somerset Council.

WECA is a driving force for clean, inclusive growth. We're bringing the region together, helping to make sure our residents have better skills, more job opportunities and a better standard of living. Through our investments, we are committed to making the West of England a better place to grow up and to live, a place where everyone can benefit from the wider success of the region.

We are championing the region internationally, bringing in investment and creating opportunities for our businesses. We want our town and city centres to be great places where people want to live. We want them to be less reliant on cars, and to be more pleasurable, with better air quality. We want more people to walk, cycle and use public transport because these are the best options.

We're working to ensure that all the elements of a successful region are connected – creating communities that are linked to jobs and training, opening up more opportunities for more people.

We will achieve our ambitions by investing in the three priority areas: infrastructure, skills and business.





Inclusive Growth

The West of England has one of the most highly skilled workforces in the country, but there remains a real contrast between rich and poor, and residents don't benefit equally from the successes of our region.

Our businesses have skills shortages in some areas and there are pockets of deprivation, where finding a job and affordable housing is difficult.

Skills and training are at the core of our economic recovery and growth. Whether that's helping residents keep their jobs, find new opportunities or join the workforce for the first time. We're identifying opportunities for our key and important business sectors to emerge strongly from the pandemic and working to ensure that all our residents have access to the skills they need to prosper and secure jobs that are being created here.

This is core to our region's ambitious Local Industrial Strategy, which is led by the West of England Combined Authority and Local Enterprise Partnership working with our businesses and universities. Further details of our current and proposed actions in response to the pandemic, including our Economic Recovery Board, are set out in section 9.



Climate Emergency

The West of England declared a Climate Change Emergency in July 2019, committing the region to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Our Local Industrial Strategy identifies a series of actions to take forward to support clean growth.

We are committed to clean growth that benefits every resident – environmental factors are considered as part of everything we do. Further details of the way in which our activities and funding will contribute to addressing climate change are set out in section 9.



Connecting the Region

We're bringing partners together to improve transport across the region, to provide sustainable, long-term solutions to help people move around more easily, reduce congestion and improve the environment we live in.

Better transport will also support the delivery of new homes as well as improving access to jobs, linking new homes and communities with employment areas.

We've already allocated millions to improving our busiest routes – including rail, road, public transport network improvements and walking and cycling routes.

Our main transport routes will allow for the prioritisation of buses and improved connections with new and improved Park and Ride sites and rail stations, and we are working to assess a new and ambitious mass transport system that will revolutionise the way we move people around the West of England.

Our Cycling and Walking Plan proposes investment in cycling and walking routes of £411m over the next 16 years, focussing on 30 local high streets as well as improvements along 55 continuous cycle routes.

Smart transport and technology have a key role to play including our Future Transport Zone proposals of which a trial of e-scooters is one of the first projects to get underway.



Digital connectivity

WECA is investing in digital connections to support innovation and collaboration in the region, we are exploring options for a local 'Mobility as a Service' pilot to design and test replicable transport innovations that can improve connectivity and expanding the region's 5G testbed to demonstrate 5G capability through 5G Smart Tourism.

This will enhance regional productivity, widening access to employment and creating globally significant use cases to drive investment and establish the West of England as a world leader in the development of advanced fixed and mobile communication systems.

Local Industrial Strategy Productivity Challenge

The Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) identifies productivity as a key priority, and highlights a number of projects, programmes and initiatives to address it including evolving the West of England Growth Hub.

Working with our councils and partners, a £5m package of interventions was launched in early 2020 seeking to engage with and impact over 3,000 businesses to deliver productivity improvements.

This work is being refocused to help kick-start the regional economy following the Covid-19 outbreak. The aim is to help businesses build their financial resilience, innovate, adopt best practice, and boost their productivity.



Rail Programme

We have ambitious plans to significantly increase travel by rail working with the Government, Network Rail and Great Western Railway. This includes, with support through the Investment Fund: improving the Severn Beach line to provide direct and more frequent services to Bath and Westbury; re-opening Henbury and Ashley Down stations, and providing more frequent services to Yate and Gloucester. This could generate over a million new rail journeys and give 80,000 more people access to train services.



Future Bright

In 2018 we started delivery of Future Bright – a £4m innovation pilot funded by the Department for Work and Pensions. The scheme has already supported over 700 people in work and on benefits, to improve their job prospects, security and income.

Through the Investment Fund we are extending the project for a further 3 years with locally tailored eligibility conditions with the aim to provide information or advice to a further 4,000 people.



3. THE COLLECTIVE IMPACT OF THE INVESTMENT FUND

The Investment Fund has enabled increasing alignment in strategic ambition and planning across WECA. During 2019/20, the West of England Combined Authority set out the region's long-term strategy for clean inclusive growth, investing in an extensive programme of activity across infrastructure, skills and business to support our residents and economy.

Aligned to regional strategies, the objective for the Investment Fund is to boost and strengthen economic growth in the WECA area through delivering:

- **Effective, resilient infrastructure;**
- **World class skills for employment; and**
- **Businesses that succeed**

Below is an estimate of the impact of £350m Investment Fund programme, including where matched funding has been leveraged. This is based upon approved business cases, together with an estimation of the potential impact of elements of the programme which are yet to be fully specified, through comparison with similar previous projects. It should be noted that these measures do not capture the full value of the projects, which will provide a range of specific benefits, some of which are hard to estimate precisely at this stage. The intended medium-term outcomes may be impacted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and this has also necessitated a review of the programme as set out in section 9.

EFFECTIVE, RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE



5 NEW RAILWAY STATIONS OPENED



500,000 NEW BUS JOURNEYS PER YEAR



1,450,000 NEW RAIL JOURNEYS PER YEAR



3 NEW PARK & RIDE SITES DEVELOPED



OVER 6,300 ADDITIONAL CYCLING AND WALKING TRIPS PER DAY ON NEW OR IMPROVED ROUTES



PATRONAGE INCREASE OF 25% ON TARGETED BUS CORRIDORS BENEFITING FROM IMPROVEMENTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICES AND TICKETING, ALONGSIDE COMPLEMENTARY BENEFITS FOR CYCLISTS AND PEDESTRIANS

WORLD CLASS SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT



**12,900 LEARNERS GAINING
NEW QUALIFICATIONS
OR SKILLS**



**4,350 NEW
JOBS**



**1,540 PEOPLE MOVING
INTO WORK OR GAINING
INCREASED EARNINGS**

BUSINESSES THAT SUCCEED



**CONTRIBUTION
TO SPATIAL
PLANNING AND
DELIVERY, AND
REVITALISATION
OF A NUMBER OF
HIGH STREETS**



**24,000M² OF
COMMERCIAL
FLOORSPACE
ENABLED**



**APPROXIMATELY
4,250 BUSINESSES
RECEIVING
ENTERPRISE
SUPPORT**



**£845M OF
ECONOMIC
OUTPUT (GROSS
VALUE ADDED)**

In addition to the outputs and outcomes, the Investment Fund has enabled strengthened partnership working across a range of projects and programmes, such as working with Network Rail on our rail programme. It has also supported capacity development within WECA and the local authorities and brought critical mass too; for example engaging in-house specialists reducing reliance on third parties and enabling the creation of a Capital Delivery team within WECA. As set out elsewhere in the document the Investment Fund has brought substantial match funding from the local authorities, Central Government, delivery agencies and local partners equating to £1.25 for every £1 on scheme delivery through the Investment Fund.

Workforce for the Future

The Investment Fund has been used to match fund the European Social Fund (ESF) to establish the £8m Workforce for the Future project. This will support local people facing barriers to employment and encourage more small businesses to invest in training and development.

A pilot project, Creative Workforce for the Future, commenced towards the end of 2019 led by the University of the West of England in partnership with several creative organisations in the region. The programme itself launched in February 2020 and aims to complete in-depth projects with 354 SMEs. This will include helping them take on a placement or upskill/reskill a current employee.



4. ESTABLISHING THE INVESTMENT FUND

Devolution and the creation of WECA builds on a strong track record of partnership working in the region. This includes joint working on major infrastructure projects prior to the Investment Fund such as the metrobus network, and the delivery of a range of projects through the Local Enterprise Partnership including the £202m Local Growth Fund, £500m Economic Development Fund and £57m Revolving Infrastructure Fund programmes.

The Investment Fund has enabled us to develop and extend our reach both in addressing immediate challenges and in helping bring forward a number of longer-term strategic interventions including: Mass Transit, the redevelopment of Temple Meads Station, Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus and the Somer Valley Enterprise Zone.

Mass Transit

West of England Mass Transit is a large-scale transport infrastructure programme which will provide a step change in public transport connectivity and passenger journey experience in the region, with strong links to other modes of transport including rail, bus and air transport hubs.

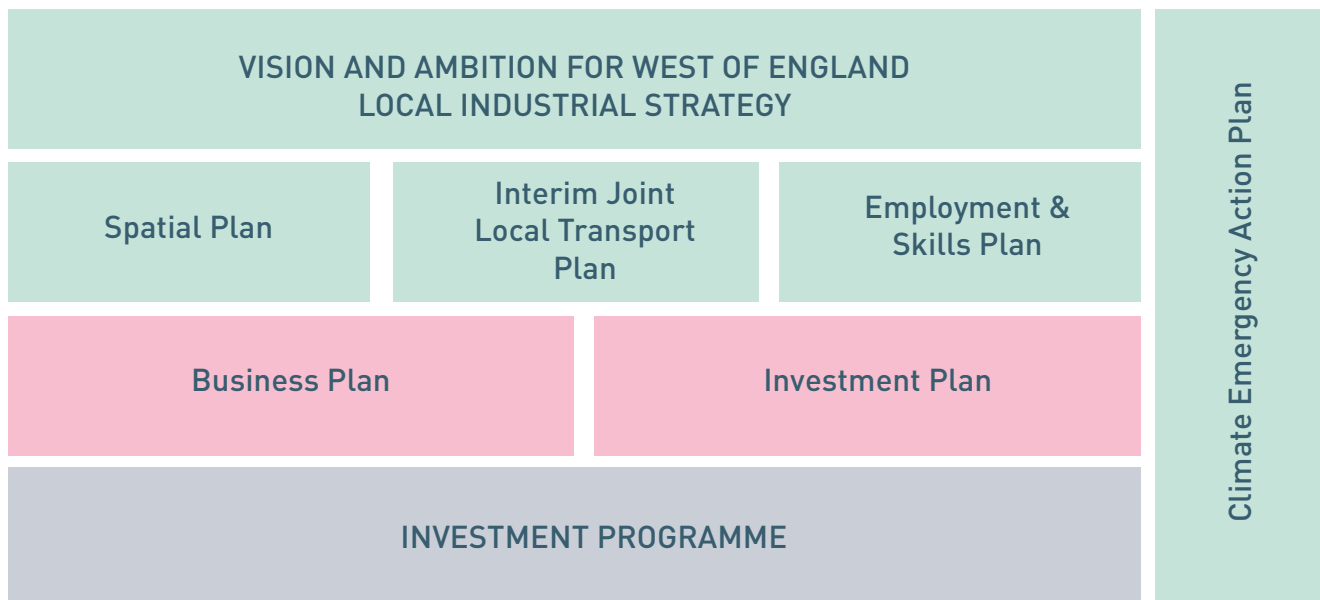
This is an ambitious plan that could dramatically improve transport for residents across our region, an initial investment of £200,000 will develop the business case so we can understand what this might look like and how much it would cost. This study will evaluate both underground and over ground route options and, where appropriate, will provide sufficient evidence that route options are worth pursuing further.

Better transport will support the delivery of new homes as well as improving access to jobs, linking new homes and communities with employment areas.



The Fund has also provided resource to allow us to undertake feasibility and development work on a range of other projects well beyond that which would have been possible with council and partner resources alone.

With the [Local Industrial Strategy](#) and [Employment and Skills Plan](#) in place, supported by the Joint Local Transport Plan and emerging Spatial Development Strategy, we have formulated a £350m investment programme to March 2023 which was approved in July 2019. This includes thematic allocations reflecting our key challenges around transport, housing, business and skills. This sits within the framework of the Capital Strategy report, approved in February 2019, which set out the planned approach for establishing a thematic 20-year programme aligned with regional priority outcomes and objectives as detailed within [WECA's Operating Framework](#).



The £350m programme spans the Investment Fund and Transforming Cities Fund which both sit within the frame of the Local Growth Assurance Framework (see section 5) and this has enabled us to dovetail these funds into one composite programme, whilst noting this needs to include transport projects commensurate with the £103m TCF award.

The funding available through the investment programme to 2022/23 includes a level of structured over programming, recognising that some schemes will encounter issues, and to ensure opportunities are fully grasped and the full impact of the funding is achieved in this timeframe. Unless an alternative funding route is planned, an allowance has also been made for the capital delivery element of schemes (termed ‘tails’) currently at development stage.

A high-level summary of the thematic split of the approved programme, as reported to the June 2020 WECA Committee, is detailed in the table below.

Transport Infrastructure	
Approved Awards and Allocations	73,940
Associated ‘tail’ required to deliver all projects up to March 2023	68,877
Total Investment	143,817
Housing, High Streets and Green Infrastructure	
Approved Awards and Allocations	62,320
Associated ‘tail’ required to deliver all projects up to March 2023	26,000
Total Investment	88,620
Business and Skills	
Approved Awards and Allocations	77,219
Associated ‘tail’ required to deliver all projects up to March 2023	21,544
Total Investment	98,773
Funding put aside to respond to opportunities and challenges	12,000
Approved WECA set up, operating costs and elections up to 2023	7,818
Total Investment Programme up to March 2023	350,000

Investment Fund Criteria

To warrant consideration for entry into the programme, a project must:

- Deliver 'additionality'/outcomes over and above current service and/or infrastructure levels;
- Demonstrate how it contributes to the strategic direction for the region and how it fits within a programme of like projects delivering wider benefit; and
- Demonstrate delivery of the required Value for Money level in compliance with the approved criteria relevant to the project in question.

In addition, to ensure that the Investment Fund continues to deliver against its required purpose of sustainable long-term inclusive growth, whilst maintaining future value and flexibility in the fund, WECA has developed and agreed core assessment criteria (agreed by the WECA Committee) which are applied to projects seeking approval. These complement the parameters and priorities for use of the fund set out in the Investment Strategy (see section 5). Funding is unlocked through business case stage gates, including testing value for money, in line with the Local Growth Assurance Framework.

5. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

Assurance Framework

Government has set out how it expects funding arrangements for the Investment Fund to provide due transparency, accountability and ensure value for money. The way that these requirements are met is set out in the [West of England Local Growth Assurance Framework](#).

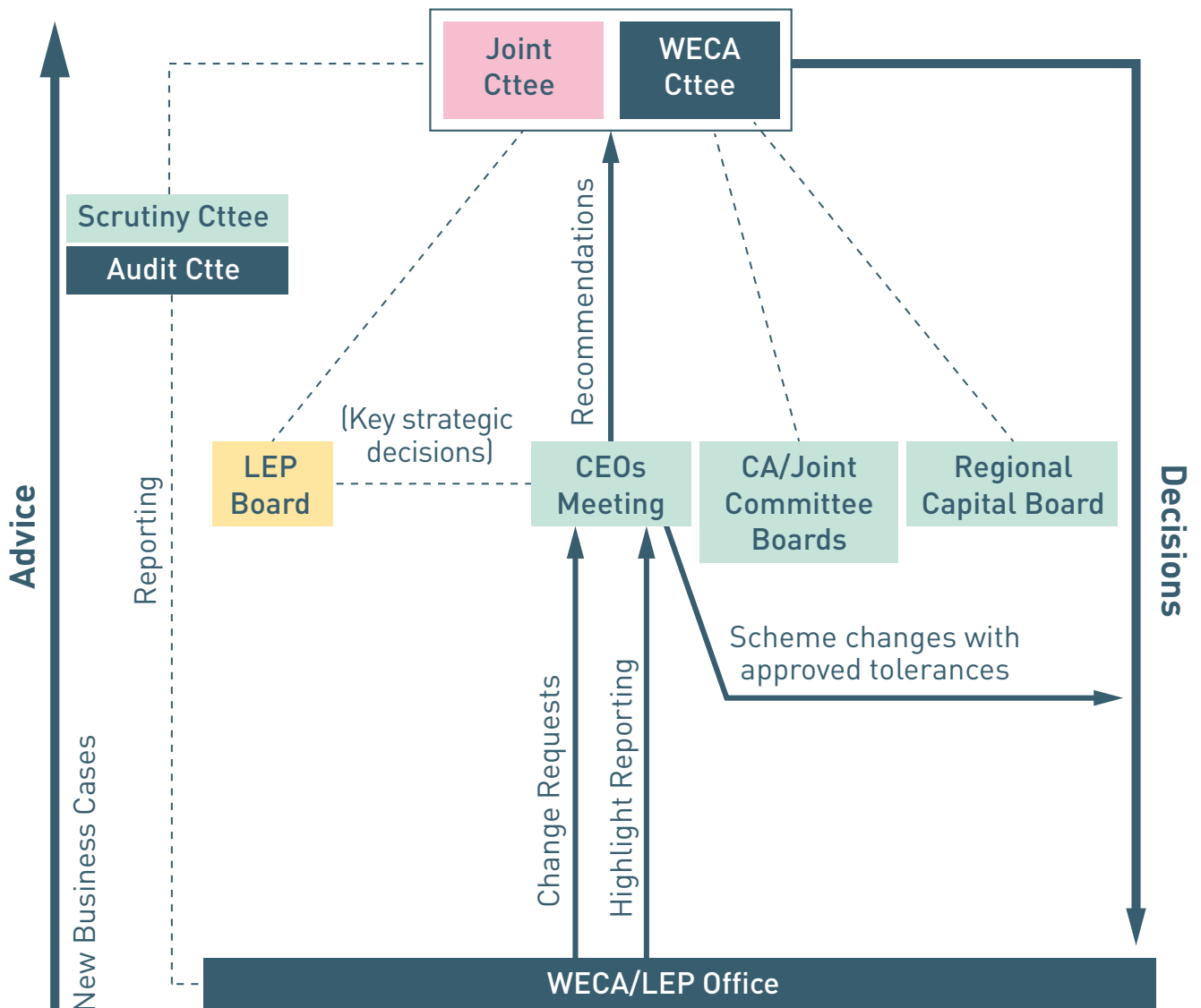
The governance arrangements for the investment programme provide timely and binding decisions, with due clarity, transparency and accountability. These are underpinned by a consistent approach which seeks to create harmonised governance, assurance and reporting arrangements. This enables requirements to be well understood by promoters and provides the flexibility to blend projects between funding streams to obtain the most appropriate mix, whilst enabling due overview and rigour. The governance structure and process is shown diagrammatically below with investment decisions and key changes to the programme being approved by the WECA Committee with advice and support provided via the Advisory Boards and the LEP Board, and with oversight by the WECA Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

We have continued to review and enhance our Local Growth Assurance Framework, which covers the Investment Fund, other devolved funding and that of the LEP, including taking steps to ensure schemes can move swiftly and efficiently through the approvals process. Recent examples include removing the number of required Committee decision-making points where schemes progress through the project development process unchanged, and making greater use of delegations to ensure schemes are not delayed awaiting the Committee cycle. These seek to ensure schemes progress at pace whilst ensuring we meet required standards and ensure value for money.

Investment Strategy

In November 2019 WECA's [Investment Strategy](#) was produced to help manage the Investment Fund programme by setting out the parameters, priorities, uses and constraints of the Fund for the initial period up to March 2023. This has helped shape and manage the programme and highlighted key requirements including bringing additionality, providing good value for money and delivering strategic regional benefits.

Another key principle within the Investment Strategy is to maximise the number of approved schemes that provide some form of repayment back in to the programme, such as through the Land Acquisition Fund (LAF), in order for the fund to become more sustainable in the long term and deliver greater impact.



Land Acquisition Fund

In order to accelerate and extend the delivery of new homes, the Investment Fund has been used to create a revolving Land Acquisition Fund (LAF). This enables parcels of land to be acquired by the councils where they help unlock sites for housing, with the funds then repaid when the development comes forward.

The first use of the LAF provided £8.3m of funding to acquire land at Bath Riverside which will enable the delivery of more than 280 new homes.



6. DELIVERY

Through the Investment Fund we initiated a set of early deliverable transport interventions aimed at addressing immediate transport challenges and enabling housing delivery. These were important in highlighting the creation of WECA and its function to the public and stakeholders soon after it was formed and include: Cribbs Patchway Cycle Links and Great Stoke Roundabout (both in delivery), Lockleaze Sustainable Transport Improvements (conditionally approved) and Somer Valley Transport Improvements (in development).

Effective delivery of this £350m programme is critical to our success as a region. Building capacity and capability will ensure we collectively:

- deliver identified outcomes;
- maximise the value of the funds we have available;
- evidence delivery capability within future funding bids to Central Government;
- provide confidence to future private investors;
- foster effective partnership working with delivery partners such as Network Rail, Highways England or the Environment Agency; and finally
- demonstrate to the people of the West of England that we are spending our devolution deal in a way that will deliver change, providing affordable housing, employment opportunities, business growth and enhanced quality of life into the future.

In addition to the significant economic benefit (£855m of GVA and 4,350 new jobs), projects will have wider impacts such as encouraging residents to take public transport rather than use private cars, and to improve rates of walking and cycling, reducing carbon emissions and improving air quality.

The projects will support the development of housing (including affordable housing) and the Enterprise Zones (EZs) and Enterprise Areas across the region. They will help people across the area gain skills and access jobs, particularly those on low incomes and in more deprived areas. Investment Fund projects will improve the innovation and productivity of businesses across the region, encouraging investment and equipping them to compete and grow successfully.

Projects are well aligned, and will enable and further exploit our economic assets and priority areas including:

- Digital Engineering Technology and Innovation Centre (National Composites Centre/ Bristol and Bath Science Park);
- Quantum Technologies Innovation Centre+ (Temple Quarter EZ);
- Bath Riverside/iSTART/Somer Valley enabling works (Bath and Somer Valley EZ);
- South Bristol Enterprise Support and Workspace.

Cribbs Patchway Cycle Links

The Cribbs Patchway New Neighbourhood is set to provide 5,760 new homes and 50 hectares of employment land. A package of five schemes is being implemented to ensure the provision of high-quality cycle improvements to and through the development, improving connectivity to jobs and housing.

Construction of the £3.125m package started in November 2019 and is due to complete next year.



South Bristol Enterprise Support

An enterprise start up and growth advice and support service has been established in South Bristol to support both new entrepreneurs and early stage SMEs. This will focus on the residents and businesses within the South Bristol Regeneration Area.

The project is funded through the Investment Fund, European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and private match funding and will support around 300 individuals or businesses.



7. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Portfolio Management

Indicative funding allocations have been made for portfolios of activity that have been identified as strategically important. Mass Transit, Strategic Rail Investment and Strategic Masterplanning are examples. To unlock the funding via a Feasibility and Development Application or Business Case, a regional approach has been established.

This approach has been developed by the appropriate teams and secures recommendations for funding via the Assurance Gateways which;

- ensure we are establishing a prioritised package of measures that will have a regional impact and deliver additionality;
- enhance efficiency by developing collaborative business cases for coherent packages, as appropriate, rather than individual projects;
- procure solutions collaboratively in order to deliver value for money solutions;
- manage projects as a regional programme to:
 - minimise anticipated disruption and manage regional resilience;
 - manage regional resource and supply chain engagement, and to take advantage of opportunities to combine activities to reduce cost.

Programme Reporting

“What gets measured, gets managed.” – *Paul Drucker, 1954.*

Effective project reporting, and dashboard analysis of performance against plan and key risks is critical to effective project management. All funded projects currently provide Highlight Reports on

a quarterly basis. The purpose of this reporting has been to monitor spend, and progress towards approval gateways or implementation milestones. As WECA has grown, our project portfolio has expanded, and we have increased capacity in our Project Management Office to support the delivery of key infrastructure programmes across the West of England. We will be using this reporting process to undertake a more detailed assessment of performance, to drive effective delivery in relation to time, cost and quality and to support the review and evaluation of projects.

Dashboard Reports are provided to highlight risks, opportunities and issues for escalation. The Dashboard is accompanied by a spend analysis to monitor actual against predicted cash flow. In this way, funds released through programme or project change can be efficiently reallocated.

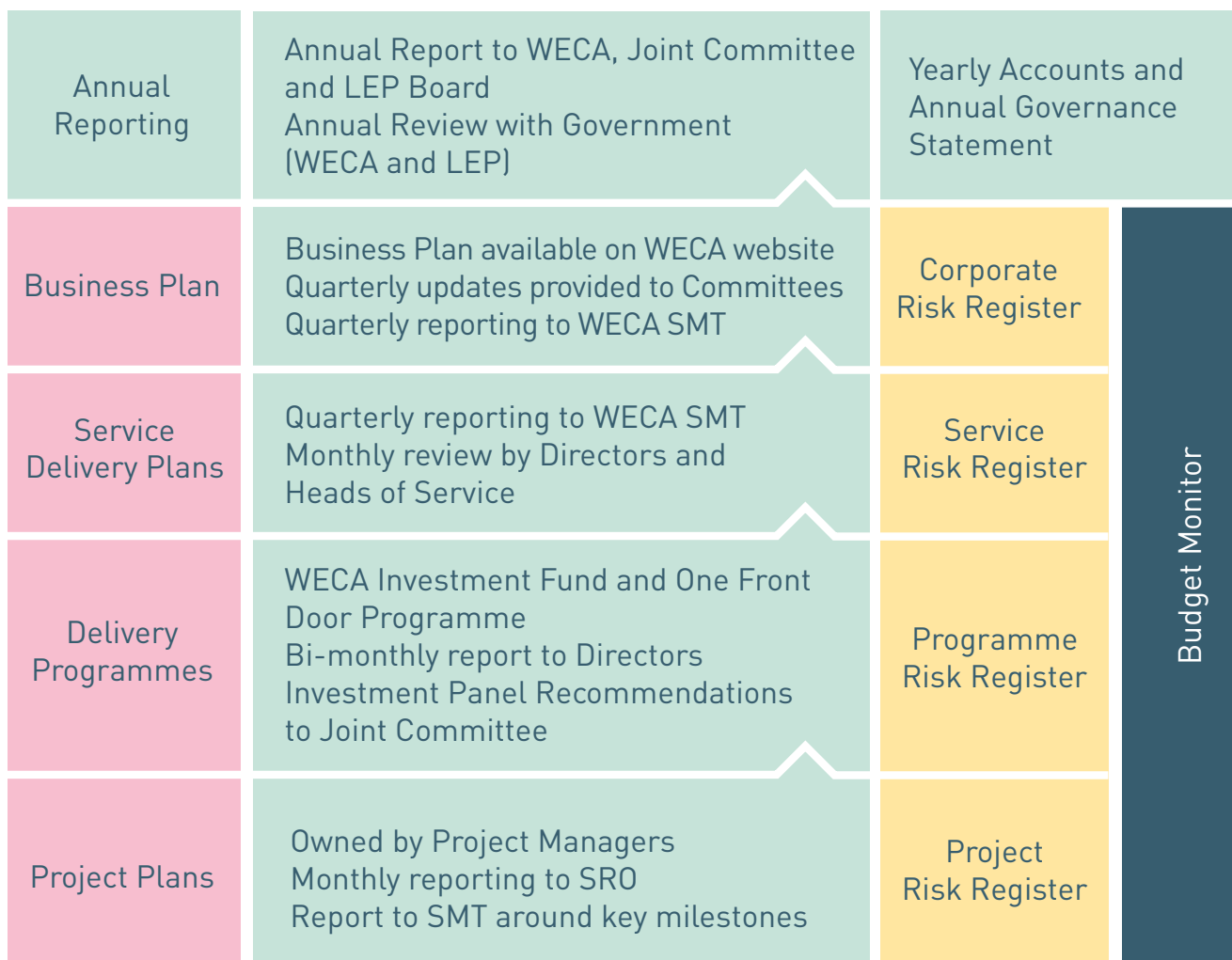
Project Reporting

Some projects and programmes will be required to report on a more regular basis due to their financial materiality, complexity in delivery or assessed level of risk. For example, work on Mass Transit and regional rail programme.

Risk Management

The West of England Combined Authority is committed to delivering its strategic objectives of clean and inclusive economic growth whilst retaining a clear focus on the potential risks and opportunities associated with the activities set out in the annual Business Plan.

The Corporate Risk Framework ensures that key risks are identified, managed and monitored and that risk management is an integral part of WECA's reporting process as set out in the diagram below.



The Corporate Risk and Service Risk Registers are reviewed each month by the WECA Senior Management Team (Heads of Service and Directors) and a quarterly report is provided to the WECA Senior Management Team and through to the Committees as part of the wider business plan quarterly reporting process.

The Investment Strategy sets out the way in which cost increases will be managed, with decision making resting with the WECA Committee unless delegation is in place and headroom exists.

The Risk Management Framework is reviewed annually with Audit Committee. The latest version, approved in February 2020, is available [here](#) on the WECA website.

Annual Business Plan

An annual Business Plan is produced which includes in-year activity to support WECA and the Local Enterprise Partnership. Our [Business Plan](#) for 2020/21 was approved by WECA and Joint Committee in January 2020.

Delivery Models

We are working through the investment programme and associated delivery routes, identifying where we have existing delivery partners (such as Network Rail) and where we will be procuring directly, and establishing the appropriate programme and project management structure to ensure delivery. The Investment Fund provides support in a range of different ways, and the delivery mechanism may change between project development and project delivery:

- Support for strategic development to be managed by WECA and delivered collaboratively;
- Support for existing project to be delivered by UA;
- Support for projects to be delivered by a third party;
- Support or projects to be delivered by WECA.

Monitoring and Evaluation

WECA's Monitoring & Evaluation Framework sets out our overall approach to the monitoring and evaluation of activities across WECA and the Local Enterprise Partnership. The approach is structured around three levels as set below:

- **Annual Business Plan.** Delivery of the annual Business Plan which includes in-year activity to support WECA and the Local Enterprise Partnership. Our Business Plan for 2020/21 was approved by WECA and Joint Committee on 31 January 2020.
- **Project and Programme delivery.** This is focused on schemes funded through the WECA Investment Fund, West of England One Front Door Programme (the process for these programmes is set out in the Local Growth Assurance Framework) and through other grant funds (e.g. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport).
- **Longer term organisational impact of the Investment Fund.** This is measured through Government five-year gateway reviews, the first of which is due to take place during 2020.



The Monitoring & Evaluation Framework is reviewed annually and shared with Government. The latest version, approved in February 2020, is available [here](#) on the WECA website and includes links to detailed project monitoring & evaluation plans.

WECA has developed a set of Regional Indicators that track the state of the region for the priority areas of the Operating Framework. Whilst we do not have total control over these measures, we expect the activities set out in our business plan to contribute to positive change in areas including economic growth, climate emergency, inclusive growth, transport, business support and skills.

8. FLEXIBILITIES OF THE INVESTMENT FUND

The Investment Fund greatly benefits from its mix of capital and revenue funding. This allows swift progress on feasibility studies and early business case development prior to the need for capitalisation. It has provided resource to allow us to undertake feasibility and development work on a range of projects well beyond that which would have been possible with Council resources alone.

The ability to use the Investment Fund flexibly to reflect local priorities, and a multi-year funding award, has enabled WECA to flex funding between different projects and programmes, and spend it in different years, to support the local economy.



The Investment Fund has already been able to lever significant match funding including:

- European Structural and Investment Funds (WE Work for Everyone, Workforce for the Future, South Bristol Enterprise Support, Research and Innovation Challenge Fund, £8m);
- Private sector match (Centre for Digital Engineering Technology and Innovation, £3.85m);
- Network Rail (Temple Meads Masterplanning, £600k).

It has allowed us to explore other Government funding opportunities by match funding and/or resourcing the development of bids to the Housing Infrastructure Fund, Future Transport Zones (£25m) and future DfT large major schemes funding.

Our £10m **Love Our High Streets** programme has allowed us to undertake feasibility and pilot work in 5 high streets/town centres (Kingswood, Bedminster, Twerton, Bath City Centre and Midsomer Norton) which has fostered knowledge sharing and left us well placed to take advantage of the Government's Future High Streets programme.

Love Our High Streets

In November 2018, through the Investment Fund we established a Love our High Streets fund of up to £10m to support high streets across the region. Pilot schemes in Midsomer Norton, Bath city centre, Twerton, Bedminster and Kingswood are exploring new ways of making high streets fit for the future, including increasing footfall, attracting new uses and improving local facilities.



The fund has also been used to link with national Future High Streets and High Streets Heritage Action Zones programmes.

We have been able to use the funds flexibly, such as:

- Employing a blended funding solution for project like MetroWest Phases 1 and 2 and the Cribbs Patchway MetroBus Extension to make best use of grant and/or reduce borrowing costs;
- Underwrite the Quantum Technologies Innovation Centre+ project against expected future funds through the successor of the LGF;
- Cash flowing Emergency Active Travel Funding in expectation of an award from DfT.

Using the Investment Fund to meet costs to develop projects for Bath College (Catering and Hospitality Training Centre) and SGS College (STEAM Centre, WISE Campus) which were then able to utilise headroom in the LGF programme.

We have cultivated relationships with local and national partners – including private and public companies and Government to broaden our investment reach and build success together, based on co-operation, trust and transparency. To deliver the projects and fully achieve the outputs we need to continue to work together, share ideas, and bring people together to celebrate our strengths and address our challenges.

The Investment Fund has helped strengthen working arrangements with delivery partners such as Network Rail on the development of MetroWest and wider rail programme and Homes England to develop capacity to support housing delivery in WECA and the councils.

9. OUTLOOK FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Digital Engineering Technology & Innovation (DETI)

The DETI project launched in July 2020, and will play an important role in driving innovation and digitally enabled recovery following the Coronavirus outbreak.

DETI is a research, innovation and skills initiative to develop and accelerate digital engineering across multiple sectors for future generations of engineers and engineering products. It is receiving £5m from the Investment Fund match funded by partners and is expected to deliver at least £62m of added research and development value over 5 years.



Bristol Temple Meads Eastern Entrance

With partners, work progresses to develop and deliver a new eastern entrance to Temple Meads station and into Temple Quarter.

The entrance will extend the existing passenger subway, used to access platforms, directly through to the development site on Cattle Market Road, where the University of Bristol plans its new Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus.

The scheme is being expedited to take advantage of the existing planned rail closure for Bristol East junction which will provide a window to implement the scheme and reduce costs.



It is recognised that the Investment Fund programme will need to be kept under review and that some fundamental reallocations may be required in response to new opportunities and emerging challenges.

WECA is continually reviewing where headroom exists and where action is required to support the economic recovery, examples include allocating £3m to underwrite DfT Emergency Active Travel Funding and a further £5m allocated to support Covid-19 economic recovery advised by the Economic Recovery Taskforce in June 2020.

Leading the Regional Response to Covid-19

The West of England Combined Authority is committed to supporting our region's residents and businesses through Coronavirus. WECA is leading the regional response to the evolving situation.

The Local Industrial Strategy vision remains at the heart of our ambition for the region, and WECA will draw on the unique strengths of the region to drive clean and inclusive economic growth. The pandemic has brought sharper focus, making achieving these goals more challenging, but may also offer opportunities.

WECA's action to support recovery must:

- address the differential impact of crisis on disadvantaged communities;
- accelerate reduction in carbon emissions, embedding positive behaviour change.

We have set up a new taskforce to drive our region's economic recovery. Led by Regional Mayor, Tim Bowles, this is a partnership between WECA, the Local Enterprise Partnership, business, universities and the region's councils.

The Taskforce is 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. This is considering the impact of the Government's economic measures on businesses and communities, identifying where additional support is needed.

WECA has already introduced a range of support 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. Examples include Trading Better Online and our Accountancy Support Programme, which aim to help businesses build their financial resilience, innovate and adopt best practice, and boost their productivity. We have also adapted our business support and skills programmes to reflect the changing needs of businesses during this unprecedented time.

Climate Emergency

The West of England declared a Climate Change Emergency on 19 July 2019, committing the region to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Our Local Industrial Strategy identifies a series of actions to take forward to support clean growth. Activity is already underway, and we are investing to tackle congestion and improve public transport, support businesses to adopt energy efficient measures through the West of England Low Carbon Challenge Fund, and investing in research and innovation projects.

Achieving carbon neutrality will require change across the system, from national Government, councils, residents and businesses. We do not have the remit to deliver this ambition on our own. However, WECA can play a role in providing regional leadership, as well as in the decisions we make in procurement, capital spend, and setting policy.

Our transport plans focus on tackling congestion and improving transport options, encouraging people to leave their cars at home. Addressing poor air quality and taking action against climate change are key objectives of our region's Joint Local Transport Plan.

WECA have included in our regional Economic Recovery Taskforce a specific Low Carbon sector to ensure climate change and green growth is at the heart of our recovery plans.

Future Devolution

The West of England Combined Authority continues to work closely with North Somerset Council (NSC). The Investment Fund has supported activities with cross boundary impacts such as the MetroWest Phase 1 rail proposals (£5.9m), supporting the Institute of Technology project led by Weston College (£500k) and enabling NSC to join area wide ESIF programmes where they can match fund. Should they decide to join the Combined Authority, WECA will support them to achieve this aim.

WECA will work with partners within the region and across the borders to propel transformative, inclusive and greener growth as part of building a new future for the economy. This will enable us to work at scale with others in the broader Western Gateway area to deliver against Government ambitions to create strong regions able to contribute to the levelling-up of the UK.

WECA is actively working with Government through the M9 group of directly-elected regional Mayors on future devolution and strengthening the power of Combined Authorities to better serve our residents and communities. We will develop and communicate a clear vision for WECA, consulting on direction and working with partners across the region. We will strive to secure new funding to help us drive the clean and inclusive economic growth across our region that we are focused on delivering.

Summary

WECA is reviewing the Investment Fund portfolio and adapting our work and bringing in a number of new schemes to support residents and businesses. Our flexible funding mechanism allows us to be responsive to tip more funds into where they are most needed, and lever investment from the next available source.

Devolution is now more important than ever. To ensure a successful recovery, we have to work at a regional level – none of us live our lives according to council boundaries. By working together, we know we can achieve so much more.