

## Scrutiny Theme 2: Strengthening the Sub-Regional Economy

### Purpose of report

1. To outline how this objective is being addressed by the Partnership's work and seek the views of members.

### Background

2. The Joint Scrutiny Committee will recall that they approved *Strengthening the Sub-regional Economy* as the basis for the second of the three Scrutiny Themes identified at their meeting in September. This included the following elements within the theme:
  - Improve skills to meet the needs of business
  - Ensure the availability of a workforce to match high levels of projected growth in the medium and long term
  - Ensure adequate supply of business sites and premises
  - Enhance the locational advantages of the sub-region by improving local and strategic access and investing in cultural facilities
  - Encourage and support enterprise and innovation
  - Support key sectors in the local economy
  - Market the sub-region to attract inward investment.

### Multi-Area Agreement (MAA)

3. As Members will be aware, the actions to strengthen the economy underpin the MAA and its delivery, the key outcomes being:
  - Attract and grow business investment to increase economic growth and competitiveness
  - Improve skills and reduce worklessness to increase competitiveness, growth and regeneration.
4. The MAA Delivery Plan sets out the more detailed objectives and actions adopted by the sub-region. These are summarised in Appendix 1 and were discussed at the Joint Scrutiny Committee on 30 October.

### Skills and Competitiveness Board

5. At its meeting on 14 January the West of England Partnership Board approved the establishment of the West of England Skills and Competitiveness Board. This will ensure:

- i. Employers with the sub-region have the powers to steer national Skills and Funding Agency priorities and spend on employment and skills, which are key to improving competitiveness and tackling disadvantage;
  - ii. Employers' engagement and give them a strong voice to ensure their commitment to investing in skills;
  - iii. Employers' advice challenges and sharpens the quality of public interventions to –
    - Better support business
    - Increase the sub-region's competitiveness
    - Increase the attractiveness of the sub-region to business investors and government;
  - iv. Strengthen the Partnership's achievements, reputation and influence.
6. Much of the work of the Board and officers at a sub-regional level is:
- Setting direction and priorities;
  - Joining-up the agenda and resources of partner organisations;
  - Completing work most effectively undertaken in one place; and
  - Promoting the interests of the sub-region and its businesses with investors, including government and its agencies.
7. This provides a useful framework to assist complementary working by local authorities in their areas with partner organisations, including government agencies and the Third Sector.
8. The Board will be supported by an officer group, which will co-ordinate, commission and manage collaborative activity. This will comprise:
- The West of England Partnership
  - Heads of Economic Development
  - South West Regional Development Agency
  - Job Centre Plus
  - Skills Funding Agency regional officers
  - GWE Business Link
  - Officers from further and higher education institutions
  - Representatives from the Third Sector.

## **Inward investment**

9. The Partnership has a small inward investment team which was set up in 2007 to:
- Maintain a centralised commercial property database for the West of England area, accessed at [www.investwest.org](http://www.investwest.org)
  - Act as first point of contact for inward investment enquiries
  - Provide support to businesses seeking to relocate or expand within the West of England area
  - Develop marketing and promotion activities to promote the West of England as a business location.
10. The property database, accessible to via the Invest West website, allows businesses looking to expand or relocate to search for available commercial premises. It currently lists almost 1,400 properties, covering new and refurbished offices, industrial premises, incubator units, serviced workspace and land. It also

covers retail premises in Bath & North East Somerset and North Somerset but, due to lack of resources and the quick turnaround of this type of properties, it does not currently list available retail units in Bristol or South Gloucestershire. The Invest West Team now deals with over 130 local commercial agents who regularly send new instructions and update information.

11. The Team has a small marketing budget and its marketing activities have recently focused on key international inward investment press, specific local events and publications. The aim of these activities is to raise consciousness of end users and organisations of opportunities of locating in the West of England and raising profile of the free property database with local business audience.

### **Local authority core functions that support and strengthen the sub-regional economy**

12. As well as the contributions of employers and the agencies listed above in paragraph 7, local authorities' core services support the achievement of a strengthened sub-regional economy in the following main ways:
  - Supporting achievement by young people in schools and colleges;
  - Delivering an effective transport system;
  - Handling major planning applications;
  - Building the confidence of public and private investors in the strengths and potential of the sub-regional economy and ensuring leadership and strategic capacity.

### **Recommendation**

That members give their views

### **Appendix 1 MAA Actions: Economic growth & competitiveness and skills & worklessness**

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**MAA Actions:****Economic growth & competitiveness and skills & worklessness****Attract and grow business investment to increase economic growth and competitiveness****Actions:**

- (1) Accelerate, through a programme of public and private investment the development of a set of strategic employment locations in the sub-region
- (2) Innovate to improve the marketing of the sub-region to attract high value-added businesses
- (3) Simplify and strengthen business support solutions to enhance indigenous business competitiveness
- (4) Increase business-led innovation and enterprise by further strengthening collaboration and partnership working between Higher Education Institutions and Business
- (5) Investing in Digital Infrastructure to support innovation in business and public services.

**Improve skills and reduce worklessness to increase competitiveness, growth and regeneration****Actions:**

- (1) Increase the proportion of the working age population qualified to at least Level 3 or higher -
  - Promote, employer support for Level 3+ qualifications by targeting LSC/SFA investment
  - Gear Further Education and provision more closely to employer need
  - Facilitate skills progression by young people and adults
  - Maximise the retention and inflow of individuals qualified to Level 3 or higher to the sub-region.
- (2) Increase the proportion of the working age population qualified to at least Level 2 or higher -
  - Develop and implement Public Service Compacts with the Unitary Authorities and Health Service organisations
  - Roll out the 'Single Jobs and Skills Offer' to high-employment sectors including retail and hospitality.
  - Improve employer engagement to increase their demand for clients who have engaged in securing a Level 2 qualification
  - Develop a clear pathway to accreditation for individuals undertaking learning for employability.
- (3) Reduce worklessness in the sub-region, particularly in the 11 priority wards -
  - Improve complementary working in support of the worklessness by aligning and/or joining up services offered by the public sector, third sector providers and DWP contractors
  - Support individuals to tackle barriers, develop and trial a working model for the 'customer journey' working with specific cohort(s) from the priority wards
  - Prepare submission for 2011-2013 priority 1 ESF, targeting resource on those with most distance to travel/multiple barriers to augment existing provision
  - Ensure that new programmes of support to reduce worklessness are subject to Level 2 co-commissioning and take into consideration the needs of the most deprived.