

TIME FOR GROWTH

West of England Mayoral Manifesto



Foreword

Time for Growth: West of England Mayoral Manifesto

As we look toward the future, the West of England stands at a pivotal moment, ready to unlock its full potential. The Devolution White Paper articulates the government's commitment to deepen devolution to existing Mayoral Combined Authorities by working in partnership to grant additional powers and responsibilities, particularly areas related to planning, spatial development, and housing. The next mayoral term, therefore, presents an ideal opportunity to shape a dynamic, innovative, and forward-thinking economy.

The Devolution White Paper proposes granting the next mayor of the West of England Combined Authority enhanced powers over spatial development, planning, and economic initiatives, along with increased funding flexibility. The mayor should work in partnership with the government to unlock these powers, driving regional growth and contributing to the UK's broader economic development.

This manifesto outlines a clear and ambitious path for the West of England – a path that accelerates economic growth, propels us toward our goal of net-zero emissions, and ensures that our businesses and communities thrive in the face of future challenges.

The need for action has never been more urgent. The West of England is home to some of the country's brightest minds, most resilient businesses, and passionate communities. Harnessing regional assets, including its world-leading universities, thriving spin-out ecosystem, and flourishing digital cluster, will safeguard the region's future. Building on these assets, investing in skills, infrastructure, and emerging industries, will help drive productivity, boost growth, and ensure global influence.

There is a desire among the business community for each mayor and combined authority to set out a clearly defined vision backed by a narrative that reflects each region's unique characteristics. Businesses would then rally behind this vision to make it a reality.

The CBI is committed to working in partnership with the UK Mayors Group, including the next mayor of the West of England Combined Authority, on an agreed set of priorities aimed at kickstarting growth, boosting productivity, and accelerating progress towards net zero.

By investing in our strengths, fostering innovation, and harnessing the power of local devolution, we can create an economy that works for everyone.

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Kickstarting growth

The West of England has a robust economy with strong technology, digital, creative, and aerospace sectors. To further enhance its economic resilience and drive sustainable growth, the region must focus on fostering global trade relationships and attracting inward investment. The mayor can act as an ambassador for the region, promoting its strengths in innovation, technology, and sustainability on the global stage, including participating in international trade missions and fostering relationships with key global markets.

As a proponent of deeper devolution, we are committed to working alongside the next mayor to make the case for an integrated settlement – akin to the deals already reached with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities. Integrated Settlements provide greater flexibility and funding certainty over the long term. They will better equip the mayor to deliver on the region's Local Growth Plan – supporting the government's national industrial strategy. The Local Growth Plan will also provide a clear vision for businesses and stakeholders, enabling them to invest with greater confidence.

The mayor of the West of England plays a crucial role in driving the region's economic growth and development through the process of devolution. By utilising devolved powers, the mayor can make strategic decisions that best suit the region's strengths, needs, and ambitions, shaping policies that directly support high-growth sectors like technology, clean energy, creative industries, and advanced manufacturing.

Collaboration with other mayors through the UK Mayors Group can amplify the collective voice and attract investment to the UK, helping to secure investment based on the unique characteristics of each mayoral region. The UK Mayors Group, alongside the Council of the Nations and Regions, will serve as a vehicle to raise the region's profile, helping to attract even greater levels of investment.

By focusing on education, infrastructure, international trade, and investment, the mayor can help ensure that the West of England continues to thrive as an innovative and dynamic business hub.

Recommendations

- Collaborate with the UK Mayors Group to amplify the collective voice and attract investment to the UK. Ensuring regional assets and opportunities of national strategic importance are given the necessary visibility. By fostering a climate of collaboration over competition,¹ mayoral regions can focus on securing investment based on their unique characteristics, including business clusters and sector specialisms. The mayor could also work in partnership with regional MPs to showcase the region's strengths as a means of driving greater levels of investment.
- Create a fully integrated export strategy highlighting trade benefits and providing targeted business support. This strategy should leverage Avonmouth's strategic location and port facilities, as well as other key infrastructure such as Bristol Airport and the Port of Bristol.
- Promote Regional Strengths in Innovation: The West of England has strong capabilities in aerospace, advanced engineering, creative industries, and digital technologies. The region's Local Industrial Strategy highlights these strengths and sets out a vision for building on them to drive economic growth. Initiatives like the 5G Smart Tourism project demonstrate the region's ability to harness new technologies to improve quality of life and create new business opportunities.
- Champion world-class innovation clusters.² Work collaboratively with the region's businesses, anchor Universities, UKRI and Innovate UK to enable progress on key elements of the West of England Growth Plan, including the West Innovation Arc and the Bristol Bath Growth Zone. Assets such as the Bristol Robotics Laboratory, IAAPS, Temple Quarter, the National Composites Centre, and the Isambard-AI supercomputer drive technological advancements and foster high-growth sectors, enhancing the UK's global competitiveness and economic resilience.

Boosting productivity

Boosting productivity is at the heart of our economic future. To ensure the West of England remains competitive, resilient, and capable of driving growth, we must harness the power of local leadership, innovation, and collaboration. Devolution offers us a unique opportunity to make informed, strategic decisions that best suit our region's strengths, needs, and ambitions. By taking control of key economic levers, we can build a region that thrives by leveraging local expertise, accelerating growth in emerging industries, and ensuring that all businesses—large and small—have the tools they need to succeed.

Building on the government's Industrial Strategy, which emphasises the importance of local economies, innovation, and skills development, the West of England can drive forward a productivity revolution. By focusing on initiatives that enhance connectivity, facilitate digital transformation, and cultivate a skilled and adaptable workforce, we will equip businesses with the tools they need to succeed in a rapidly evolving global economy.

United by the strength of devolution and a shared commitment to local development, we will enhance productivity in the West of England—driving sustainable economic growth, creating high-quality jobs, and securing lasting prosperity for everyone.



Recommendations

- Encourages businesses to adopt inclusive employment practices to help ensure that all segments of the population benefit from economic growth. The LSIP emphasises the need for diversity and inclusion in the workplace, recommending flexible working arrangements, equal pay, and targeted recruitment efforts for underrepresented groups. These practices can create a more resilient and inclusive labour market. The West of England Good Employment Charter supports this by setting standards for good employment practices, including security, flexibility, well-being, and development. By joining the Charter, businesses can access resources and support to enhance their employment practices, resulting in increased productivity and improved employee retention.
- Supports Business Adoption of New Technologies: The Tech for Growth programme, an initiative by WECA in partnership with Business West and techSPARK, provides targeted support to small and medium businesses to enhance their digital presence and adopt new technologies. This programme includes expert workshops, hands-on specialist advice, and skills support to help businesses implement new systems, improve processes, and increase productivity.
- Promotes Health and Wellbeing in the Workforce: Helping businesses promote health and well-being in the workforce is essential for maintaining a productive and engaged workforce. The Thrive at Work West of England programme provides tools and resources to support mental health and well-being at work, including training for managers and wellness action plans.
- Enhance regional connectivity: Prioritise investment in a mass transportation system across the region and establish seamless transportation connections between the Brabazon development and Temple Quarter, as well as between Bristol city centre and Portishead and Bristol Airport. This would boost productivity by creating a more efficient and effective means of travel between a significant residential area and a key regional employment site.

Accelerating to net zero

Accelerating to net zero and achieving growth is society's defining economic challenge – one that can only be achieved through partnerships between industry and government. Inaction on the transition is costlier than action, and the business community wants to play its part in achieving sustainable growth.

Increasing decarbonisation beyond the power sector presents a significant opportunity to expand clean energy markets, scale infrastructure, and advance green technologies. The government's leading collaboration across the business and finance sectors powerfully signals to investors a focus on delivery that can help get capital moving.³

Through price support mechanisms, regions like the South West can build on nascent net zero technologies like offshore wind, hydrogen, and sustainable aviation fuels – and help launch them into competitive markets.

Businesses across the West of England have been successful in reducing their contribution towards greenhouse gas emissions, with data from the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero revealing a 50% downward trend between 2013-2022.⁴



Recommendations

- **Target emissions reductions in transport and housing:** While the region has successfully cut emissions of CO₂ per person since 2005, there remains a great deal to be done to reduce emissions in both transport and housing, the two most significant contributors to emissions across the combined authority.
- **Improving the region's bus network:** Increasing punctuality and coverage, will help reduce transport emissions, especially with 1 in 11 commutes by public transport. Furthermore, rolling out additional electric vehicle charging points across the region where gaps in provision exist, particularly in rural areas, will encourage the shift away from diesel and petrol vehicles to electric vehicles.
- **Enhance Housing and Building Infrastructure:** Addressing housing affordability and ensuring sustainable, high-quality housing development is critical. The West of England's housing strategy includes initiatives to increase the number of new carbon-neutral homes and retrofit existing buildings to improve energy efficiency. The Retrofit Accelerator supports households in insulating their homes and local businesses in meeting retrofit demand, both of which are crucial for meeting the 2030 targets.
- **Support industrial decarbonisation:** Connectivity to the national electricity grid has been a significant challenge for firms investing in the West of England. Whilst not a devolved matter, the mayor must use their convening power to champion the ambitions of the National Energy Systems Operator and support the regional spatial energy plan, prioritising projects that will deliver the Clean Power 2030 mission.
- **Champion effective climate-positive initiatives:** The West of England should work closely with the national government, local authorities, businesses, and communities to ensure coordinated efforts towards net zero and the successful implementation of the Climate and Ecological Strategy Action Plan. This Plan demonstrates the prize on offer for the region, including the creation of 45,000 green jobs and an increase in the GVA of the region's low-carbon sector from £760 million in 2020 to £3.7 billion by 2030.⁵ For example, the mayor could provide financial backing to organisations such as SETSquared, which has designed a programme to support sustainable tech businesses in the West of England⁶ or support the development of the Severn Estuary area, given its strengths in the net zero transition and logistics, providing capabilities in tidal, nuclear, hydrogen and offshore energy.

Conclusion

The West of England's economy is characterised by its strong tech, digital, and aerospace sectors, supported by a vibrant academic base and growing sustainability focus. However, challenges such as a skills gap, transport congestion, and regional inequalities must be addressed for the region to fully capitalise on emerging opportunities. With proper support, especially in education, infrastructure, and international trade, the West of England has the potential to continue its position as an innovative and thriving business hub.

The CBI is committed to working alongside the mayor and the West of England Combined Authority to help ensure sustainable economic growth. When politicians, education providers, and public and private sectors collaborate through shared interests, the West of England can unlock its full potential. CBI members based in the region stand ready to play their part in helping to drive growth and take forward the priorities within this manifesto.

A thriving West of England will ensure the region can contribute to delivering sustainable economic growth, which will benefit not only the region but the UK as a whole.

To help achieve this, the mayor should commit to working in partnership with the UK Mayors Group, which, using its convening powers, can collectively form an effective alliance for growth.



Reference

- 1 November 2023, Harrington Review of Foreign Direct Investment [The Harrington Review of Foreign Direct Investment - GOV.UK](#)
- 2 [Plan for Innovation 2024-2029](#)
- 3 [Net Zero Council relaunched to supercharge Clean Energy Superpower Mission - GOV.UK](#)
- 4 West of England Combined Authority: State of the West of England 2024 report: [PowerPoint Presentation](#)
- 5 [Plan for Innovation 2024-2029](#)
- 6 [SETsquared Partnership | the University Enterprise Collaboration](#)

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