Levelling Up Coventry

Translating the Levelling Up Strategy into Meaningful Change for Coventry
Recent years have been challenging for many of our residents, our businesses, our community infrastructure, and our council. The funding settlement from Government has been slashed, and every year we have had to make tough decisions about our services. At the same time, the gulf between the richest and poorest in our society continues to grow. The past two years of the Covid-19 pandemic has seen these inequalities magnified and multiplied, but as with the previous decade, local government has responded to the challenges.

In Coventry, we now face exciting opportunities, midway through our UK City of Culture year; with the Commonwealth Games, Children’s Games and Rugby League World Cup to follow; and with exciting new potential investment opportunities facing our automotive and cultural sectors, and city centre in particular. We now need to seize the moment and capitalise on these opportunities to level up, reduce inequalities, and ensure all residents across our city can benefit from exciting new growth and investment opportunities.

Despite concerns about previous promises failing to materialise, the publication of the Government’s Levelling Up White Paper is to be welcomed. Any steps to improve the life chances and living standards of our citizens, and reduce the widening regional inequality must be embraced. We are focussed on realising our ambitions to level up our communities, and can achieve this with more devolved powers and sustained investment in our public services.

I have always been driven by a society and economy that is underpinned by fairness and justice; opportunity for everyone regardless of their background; and a more equal society. That continues to be our driving ambition at Coventry City Council, and we remain resolute in our determination to deliver that. We know and understand our communities; we work effectively with our businesses, third sector and other local public sector partners to deliver results; and we can once again work effectively with our partners to deliver necessary change to our communities that most need to benefit from economic and social transformation.
Translating the Levelling Up Strategy into Meaningful Change for Coventry

We need to tackle the regional inequality that blights our nation, and impairs the economic and social prosperity of our people. The publication of the Levelling Up White Paper as a comprehensive strategy is welcome, however it is critical that the concept is now translated into meaningful change across our city.

In Coventry, we need to urgently realise this change, and we will work with Government, businesses, the voluntary sector, community groups and residents to achieve this. We need to improve the life chances and living standards of all of our residents. We need to ensure that good quality jobs and lifelong skills and training opportunities can be accessed by all. We must reduce poverty levels across the city, and ensure that all residents continue to have access to good quality education.

In creating good quality jobs, Coventry has the potential to be at the forefront of the UK’s sustained economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, notably through building our city’s longstanding legacy of innovation through smart mobility, culture and creativity, and modern services. We want our city to be an inclusive place to live, learn and work for all our residents, with economic growth and prosperity at the core of our plan. We want to ensure that all Coventry residents can benefit from new investment and opportunities, no matter where they live in the city, and be proud of our city’s achievements.

Coventry needs Levelling Up – indeed Etopia Home’s Levelling Up Opportunity Index ranks Coventry 3rd of 34 large UK cities in terms of opportunities to level up. Despite Coventry & Warwickshire being the fastest growing local economy in England between the 2008/09 recession and 2016/17, economic growth has slowed and in 2018/19, Coventry & Warwickshire recorded the lowest GVA growth of all local economies. Moreover, we still see major disparities in economic and social well-being.
Coventry’s GDP per head is below the national average.

**National GDP per head**
- National average: £33,876
- Coventry average: £31,668

Although the gap is narrowing. Currently 40% of Universal Credit claimants in Coventry are in work compared with the regional average of 39%.

**Coventry’s claimant count (5%)** exceeds the national average of 4.4%.

33% of the city’s population are from an ethnic minority (compared to 20% in England). However, this rises to 48.7% of our schoolchildren and they are more highly concentrated in Coventry’s more deprived areas.

**50 first languages are spoken** in Coventry schools by 50 or more people, which presents resourcing challenges for our schools.

14% of our neighbourhoods are ranked in the most deprived 10% nationally.

(36%) of Coventry’s children live in poverty – this rises to 58% of children in Foleshill ward, compared to 18% in Wainbody ward.
Our employment rate (69.8%) is lower than the national average of 74.6%, showing the need to get more residents into good quality jobs.

There are stark disparities in health equality, with a 10-year difference in life expectancy for male residents living in different areas of the city and 8-year difference for females.

Coventry has 10,200 businesses, of which 98% are small or micro – further targeted investment in our business support ecosystem could further raise wealth, prosperity and the life chances of our residents.

There are currently high employment vacancy numbers, mostly in low paid roles and the service industry. COVID-19 and Brexit challenges have impacted Coventry’s advanced manufacturing industry. The Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber Business Confidence Survey for September 21 to December 21 showed confidence amongst manufacturing businesses had the biggest decline (from 80.0 to 62.9) due to rising prices and supply chain issues, with domestic sales down from 51.3 to 50.5 and overseas sales falling from 57.1 to 39.7.

COVID-19 has also heavily hit footfall in Coventry City Centre which despite successful City of Culture activity remains 26% down on 2019 levels.
We see 10 interlinked strategic areas of opportunity through which we can work with Government to achieve our shared Levelling Up ambitions:

1 REALISING INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Successful levelling up will only be achieved in Coventry if all of our residents are able to benefit from the economic growth and job creation that we aspire to create.

Coventry Job Shop and its diversity of partners across the City successfully connect our wide-ranging communities to local businesses - employers get the right people to be successful and grow; and residents are supported in to the best opportunities. This includes residents furthest from the labour market and the most vulnerable. Residents are supported to access the right skills provision to help them progress into or within their chosen career, with the Job Shop and partners being fully connected to Coventry’s skills ecosystem. The Coventry Job Shop work with a wide range of community partners through various European Social Fund (ESF) programmes and support over 1,000 residents into sustainable work every year. We will continue to monitor trends facing the local economy, and trends facing different social groups and communities to ensure that our services evolve effectively, to ensure we continue to support our residents to access appropriate employment and training opportunities.

We are keen to build on our successful Ambition Coventry Youth Employment Initiative, and continue to support young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET) on a pathway to work. In addition, we were the first Local Authority in the region to launch a Youth Hub which fully integrates the Ambition Coventry programme with JobCentre Plus youth support, ensuring co-working to remove barriers and better access to DWP programmes such as Kickstart.

Through our new Social Value and Sustainability Policy, we are also taking steps to increase the capacity of local businesses to access procurement opportunities, which will also ensure that Coventry’s people and businesses realise maximum benefit from new wealth created locally.

It is vital that through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the Government continues to invest in the Coventry Job Shop and other established employment support schemes to enable us to build on successes. We are concerned that in the current UKSPF proposals, funding for “People and Skills” does not start until 2024/25. This leaves a gap in service provision, with our current ESF
Employment Support Programmes ending in December 2023, but winding down from July 2023. There needs to be overlap in funds to prevent a loss of resource and all the momentum gained from the ESF programmes, as well as loss of community provision. There is also concern that the UKSPF itself is lower value than the combined ERDF/ESF funding, and some of UKSPF is already committed to the Multiply Programme. Finally, we are concerned that the UKSPF will be administered on a regional level through Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs). This risks the UKSPF being directed to other areas of the region, or programmes being designed that are “regional one size fits all”, and not designed to meet our local needs.

We also need to see further Government investment in UKSPF and other future funds in five key areas:

- The delivery of in-work support to enable people, especially young people and those with complex needs to sustain employment.

- Additional and more tailored support to enable those furthest from the labour market and those most impacted by Covid-19 to tackle barriers to employment eg mental health challenges, loss of confidence.

- Greater support for those with disabilities into meaningful employment. We have been highly successful with Supported Internships but need to build provision for adults over the age of 24 who are no longer funded for Supported Internships.

- Provide greater support to increase the number of apprenticeship starts from young people from ethnic minority groups, and to also address the disparity that fewer people from ethnic minority groups complete their training programmes.

- Support to enable individuals to enter self-employment and run sustainable businesses, including more tailored support for women and ethnic minority entrepreneurs.
TACKLING INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION AND SKILLS OUTCOMES

Although we have a strong track record of working with Coventry’s two universities, local colleges and schools, further intervention is needed if we are to ensure that residents across all areas of the city have access to good quality education and training; that we boost productivity in the workplace; and that our future workforce has the necessary skills to deliver the innovation that our future economy will need.

Our city’s schools have been levelling up for many years. School Improvement has been a key success arising from Coventry City Council’s Education Partnership. Our Education Partnership approach works holistically with all schools regardless of their status, and has been transformational in terms of city-wide outcomes, whilst enabling us to manage the city’s high needs provision and funding challenge.

Coventry’s Education Partnership has contributed towards transforming outcomes for children and young people in our city. In 2013, 42% of our primary children attended good or outstanding schools. Today 93% of our primary children attend good or outstanding schools, and we have been above the national average since 2016. Since 2016, we have also seen significantly improved outcomes for KS2 Reading Writing Maths (RWM) including for disadvantaged groups. The rate of improvement in KS2 between 2016 and 2019 is higher than the rate of improvement seen nationally. Despite this significant turnaround, the School Improvement Monitoring & Brokering Grant which is allocated to local authorities to support school improvement activities will be reduced by 50% for financial year 2022/23, and removed completely in 2023/24.

We welcome Coventry’s selection as an Education Investment Area. We are keen to work with the Coventry Education Partnership, Department for Education, and other relevant partners to ensure that the opportunities this brings are aligned with the strategic direction of the Coventry Education Partnership, and incorporates and builds on the successes we have seen in our education system, that results in positive life chances and appropriate destinations for our children and young people.
We will be seeking additional funding and support to improve performance in our city’s schools. However, it does feel disjointed as additional initiatives are introduced in some areas, while unnecessary changes are made in others. We aspire to meet the pledge that 90% of children leaving primary school will reach expected standards in reading, writing, and maths.

In the forthcoming Schools White Paper, we need to see a whole system approach to adequately fund schools through a review of the National Funding Formula, which accounts for deprivation, local needs, and levelling up. The Schools White Paper also needs to apply an integrated systemic policy, which delivers improved educational attainment alongside other local authority services that tackle barriers to learning, such as mental health and social care, and the work of our network of Family Hubs. Such interventions to support people in their early years would help to mitigate against the impacts of child poverty.

Further investment is also needed to upskill our adults, and reduce the gap between Coventry and the national average in terms of the percentage of our adults with no qualifications or lacking NVQ Levels 1-3 qualifications, and deliver improved skills pathways through all educational levels so that all residents can see long-term and sustainable value in what they are doing. We need further investment to allow us to continue to co-design skills solutions with local businesses, particularly through Sector Based Work Academy Programmes (short-term sector-specific training and work experience schemes).

We welcome the announcement of the £560m Multiply Programme as part of the UKSPF. Improving adult numeracy is a key priority for our city, and will contribute to better jobs outcomes for our residents. However, we await further detail as to how the funding will be allocated and delivered, and whether it can be used to build upon our existing numeracy provision funded via the Adult Education Budget (AEB).

It is also crucial that the UKSPF is designed in a way that allows us to not only support Coventry businesses across all sectors of the economy to create new employment opportunities, but also to enable our residents furthest from the labour market to access a pathway to employment, and support our residents in the lowest skilled/lowest paid work to develop new skills to progress, to help drive growth and reduce in-work poverty. We are best placed to deliver a devolved Careers Service, given our position between employers, our schools and colleges, and the voluntary sector, and our track record.
TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

As a Marmot city, Coventry can play a leading role in tackling health inequalities, and reducing disparities in health and life expectancy between different areas of the city and improve wellbeing. To level up, we need to take a system-wide approach considering health in all policies, working with the Marmot partnership to ensure health inequalities remains a priority at a strategic level, and feeds into our One Coventry infrastructure, the Integrated Care Boards, and the Anchor Alliance.

Our Healthy Lifestyles services provide holistic lifestyle support to residents, targeting areas of highest deprivation, people from ethnic minorities communities, and residents with long term conditions. This service provides health coaching to support healthy weight, smoking cessation and alcohol reduction. We have expanded our community weight management service offer to integrate within local primary care networks and deliver targeted community programmes for men who traditionally engage less with services.

We are working with NHS colleagues to strengthen inpatient smoking cessation and onwards support in our communities. We are taking a population health management approach to delivery of services, that is using data and insight to ensure that our services are reaching the most vulnerable and those most likely to have poorer health outcomes, and embedding prevention within disease specific pathways.

We will also apply learning from our response to the pandemic in reducing health inequalities. In responding to differences in cases, hospitalisations and deaths, testing and vaccination uptake; non-adherence to restrictions, and predominancy of certain types of employment which resulted in greater transmission, we took an approach centred on community engagement. This enabled us to understanding better the variation between neighbourhoods in how residents understood and adhered to national messaging; uptake of testing, vaccinations, isolation and with support payments; and how our Authority needed to work with community organisations in these areas to understand the reasons and modify our services to make them more accessible.

Through the new One Coventry Plan, we will apply similar approaches to other areas of health (eg screening services and smoking cessation) as well as social care services, employment support, skills support and access to benefits, which further re-enforces our commitment to working better with our communities to reduce health inequalities.
We therefore urge the Government to commit to ongoing investment in these programmes through the Public Health grant, as well as more sustainable finance specifically for the additional areas of development such as delivery of Long Term Plan. Health inequalities thrived due to Covid-19, and we now have a once in a generation opportunity to tackle health inequalities and narrow the gap in life expectancy and improve wellbeing. A White Paper on Health Disparities will ensure our approach involves specific targeting of people with the poorest health outcomes, to ensure that it serves to reduce these inequalities.

We will continue and expand our Call-to-Action programme which is helping businesses identify the potential cause of health inequalities and guide them in the actions they can take to address these issues. Although the creation of good quality jobs, and supporting unemployed residents to access these opportunities will help, we will support local businesses to take further action, including implementing the real living wage; investing in training and skills development; providing apprenticeships and placements; implementing fair work practices; and participating in community initiatives.

We would like more emphasis on the importance of businesses taking a pro-active approach and adopting some of these measures which will provide an opportunity to reduce health inequalities; benefit their workforce; enable more people to escape poverty; and enhance the long-term competitiveness of their business. We urge the Government to invest in initiatives that tackle the social determinants of health, taking a place-based approach that emphasises the roles these business ecosystems need to play to bolster health and productivity within communities. This needs to take place alongside investing in measures to support businesses to grow and create high quality jobs or innovate/diversify and retain high quality local jobs.
A key enabler for levelling up will be the creation of new good quality skilled jobs. We have achieved planning permission to build the West Midlands Gigafactory at Coventry Airport. The next step is to secure the required £2.5bn in public and private investment to build the facility, power supply and enabling infrastructure works, which then has potential to directly create 6,000 new local high-quality jobs, and support a further 10,000 indirect jobs. The West Midlands Gigafactory is critical to inward investment, regeneration, and securing long-term high-skilled jobs for our city and region.

We urge the Government to work in partnership with us as we seek to identify a global investor to ensure the West Midlands Gigafactory becomes a home for green growth, a sustainable future, and secure employment. To ensure our region’s business base secures maximum benefit from this development, as well the newly opened UK Battery Industrialisation Centre, we would also urge the Government to invest in enhancing the local business, innovation and skills support ecosystem. We must develop the supply chain and ensure they are geared to access these new global market opportunities. In addition, we must ensure those furthest from the labour market can access the new job opportunities, through fully integrated early planning of skills provision to meet our employers’ emerging needs and wraparound employment support. We are interested in the White Paper’s proposal for Innovation Accelerators to enhance local growth, particularly with the West Midlands selected as one of the first three Innovation Accelerators, and will engage with local economic growth partners to continue dialogue with the Government on this.
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DRIVING THE RECOVERY AND EXPANSION OF UK CULTURAL INDUSTRIES

Coventry’s is uniquely placed to realise strong legacies from UK City of Culture 2021, the 2022 Commonwealth Games, Children’s Games and 2022 Rugby League World Cup, by using culture as a catalyst for driving economic, social and community prosperity.

We want to cement Coventry as a national cultural beacon through investment in supporting the continued growth of our creative economy, and securing investment to realise the National Collections Centre. This new nationally significant collections and cultural facility could create numerous new employment and education opportunities, and further opportunities for Coventry residents to actively participate in cultural activities, whilst also driving sustainable continued growth of the city’s visitor economy. Further investment in our cultural assets will also increase Coventry’s appeal as a place to live, as well as its profile to continue hosting major events, which will boost our potential to secure further investment. We urge the Government to invest further in the business support ecosystem to enable the growth and development of our creative sectors, and ensure that our economy capitalises on the unique opportunities that these legacies offer.
TRANSFORMING COVENTRY INTO A MODERN CITY CENTRE

Securing public and private investment to realise the mixed-use Friargate and City Centre South developments will create new job opportunities and new homes, as well as new retail and leisure space. We are making significant progress with the Friargate scheme (located adjacent to Coventry Station), with One Friargate constructed and fully occupied, Two Friargate under construction and the Hotel Indigo under commencing on site in the Spring.

The updated City Centre South Plans have secured outline planning approval, and the scheme is now seeking a joint venture funding/residential partner. These developments could potentially be attractive to investment from the professional services sector, public services, and also ICT, as many industries seek to capitalise on opportunities presented by moving to more hybrid ways of working.

In implementing our Social Value & Sustainability Policy, we will continue to work with developers at an early stage, in identifying potential training and apprenticeship opportunities for residents and procurement opportunities for local businesses to maximise economic benefit for Coventry.

To help attract further private investment to Central Coventry, we urge Government Departments and Agencies to embrace the Places for Growth Programme that will relocate civil servants out of London. With our grade A, future proofed and sustainable office space, excellent public transport links, talent pool of young graduates, and affordable housing, we urge the Office of Government Property to work with Departments and Agencies to relocate offices to Coventry.
In preparation for UK City of Culture 2021, we delivered innovative public realm enhancements to improve accessibility to the city centre, make the area safer, and improve the area’s attractiveness to visitors and shoppers.

Whilst this has improved Coventry’s image nationally, there are areas of the city centre fringe that still require public realm enhancements to increase the appeal of neighbouring sites for investment, as well as creating flexible spaces that can adapt to multiple economic uses. There is also a need to improve the streetscape in local centres in Coventry’s suburbs, as well as creating more green spaces to promote healthier lifestyles. We urge the Government to expand its investment in placemaking interventions to reinvigorate high streets. We would also urge the Government to make more levelling up funding available to deliver transformational placemaking interventions in our most deprived areas, to make them more attractive and safer for residents, for shoppers, and more attractive for further business investment, and investment in new homes.
Coventry has a longstanding legacy of transport innovation and is once again at the forefront of pioneering new concepts that have potential to achieve net zero, improve air quality, and provide affordable options to connect residents in our most deprived areas with the city centre and job and training opportunities.

As well as becoming the UK’s first All Electric Bus City in 2025, we are developing a new patented Very Light Rail (VLR) system. This could halve the costs of urban light rail, compared to tram networks, with the prototype battery-powered vehicle now built, using two-thirds UK components, and track technology in place. It also has potential to create a new manufacturing supply chain for a product that is potentially exportable. We now need committed funding from Government to enable us to install a city centre demonstrator of VLR technology by the end of 2023, and subsequently construct the first route.
INVESTING IN RENEWABLE ENERGY TO ACHIEVE NET ZERO

We need further investment in expanding our renewable energy and power supply network if we are to service our economic growth potential, which includes investing in new Smart Energy Hubs, focused on solar PV and battery storage.

We are keen to build on our recent innovative work in renewable energy generation, including the Regional Energy System Operator project (exploring the development of new types of city-scale low carbon energy generation, storage and management systems); our work installing solar PV in public buildings, integrating with battery storage; and investment in a new Regional Material Recycling Facility.

We are also currently working with the Birmingham City Council and Wolverhampton City Council in leading an ambitious £10bn programme to translate world-leading R&D into new systems designed for high energy efficiency in up to 200,000 homes, reducing fuel poverty, and creating thousands of new supply chain jobs. We need the Government to invest in the roll-out of this programme and ensure the impacts become a reality.
Our partnership with City Fibre and Vodafone has resulted in £60m of investment to ensure 93% of premises in Coventry are now connected to Full Fibre Broadband (second nationally), and we have been at the forefront of the West Midlands 5G Test Bed.

As well as continuing to expand our digital infrastructure, we must see investment in the business support ecosystem to ensure that enough of our businesses across all sectors of the economy are effectively adopting digital technologies, not least to develop new products and services to boost their competitiveness, resilience and productivity, and that the skills support ecosystem is equipping our workforce with the necessary skills to enable this.
Coventry City Council would welcome the opportunity to engage with partners on the vision set out in this document. In the first instance, please contact communications@coventry.gov.uk