



Economy & Skills Board

Date/time	15 October 2025, 9:30am – 11:30am
Location	NatWest HQ, 2 Trinity, Avon Street, BS2 0PT
Co-chairs	Cllr. Andrew Brown – Committee Chair, Economy and Skills Committee Palie Smart – Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Global Civic Engagement, University of Bristol
Meeting Attendees:	
Members	Alex Maggs, Bristol City Council; Alex Richards, Western Training Provider Network; Anesa Kritah, Bristol City Council; Dan White, Bristol City Robins Foundation; Heloise Balme, Bristol Food Network; Jenny Ablett, Business West; Judith Langdon, One City; Lis Anderson; Matt Hatcher, Natwest; Melanie Monaghan, Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership (HWCP); Molly Byrne, BBRC; Paul Bennett; Sado Jidre, Bristol City Council; Siobhan Denniff, Hargreaves Lansdown; Steve Bluff, Temple BID; Sue Cohen, Bristol's Woman's Commission; Tim Westwood, Kier Construction.
Observers	
Invitees	
Apologies	James Berry, Great Western Credit Union; Jane Taylor, Bristol City Council; Natalie Doherty, City of Bristol; Stephen Bashford, WECA.
ITEM	
1) Welcomes & Introductions	
The chairs began by welcoming the members. The members then went around the room introducing themselves.	
2) How can we unlock South Bristol's potential as a priority for inclusive growth?	
<p>Presented by: Cllr Brown</p> <p>The South Bristol Economic plan to unlock South Bristol's potential is structured around three missions; these each have targeted priorities to support inclusive and sustainable economic growth -</p> <p>Fair: Economic Equity for South Bristol Residents; Thriving: Deliver Most Productive Economic Growth; Green: Create first Net Zero economy</p> <p>These missions also have priorities over its first year of delivery, as seen on the slides provided.</p> <p>South Bristol (Any Ward South of the River) has very high deprivation rates in comparison to other areas of the city. This is reflected in benefit claimant and education statistics, however,</p>	

it was noted by members that this information is outdated. It was found deprivation impacts health outcomes and access to transport.

Despite being 32.3% of Bristol's population, South Bristol contributes only 15.4% of the city's GVA, highlighting the need for targeted economic intervention – Data also indicates GVA has risen faster in South Bristol in comparison to the rest of the city, which indicates these are significant problems.

South Bristol holds strategic advantages including regeneration momentum, industrial intensification, cultural assets (e.g. Bottleyard Studios), and available council-owned land for development.

This is why the South Bristol Economic Plan was created, which aims to connect existing institutions, improve connectivity and encourage job and business growth.

How does the economic plan impact South Bristol?

- High Street Revitalisation: Continued investment in diversifying South Bristol's high streets (e.g. East Street, Filwood Broadway) through cultural programming, public realm improvements, and commercial property grants.
- Workforce Development: Addressing workforce shortages, especially in the caring economy, and launching a Bristol Green Skills Academy to support Net Zero goals and green job creation.
- Inclusive Growth & Skills Pipeline: Leveraging the Bristol Temple Quarter development to align local skills provision with job opportunities, ensuring residents benefit from regeneration.
- Regeneration Projects: Active developments in Bedminster, Mead Street, Brislington, Hengrove Park, Knowle West, and the £20M Hartcliffe Trailblazer initiative are set to deliver thousands of homes, workspaces, and community assets.

CLlr Brown advised that the top Business sector in South Bristol is Construction, but the business survival rate is very low in South Bristol - over 1 year survival rate was high, but after 2/3 years, this drops down to 20%.

Board members found that sustainability of business in South Bristol is low, but it was noted it may be inaccurate data due to sample sizes etc.

Members noted that this may be due to:

- Businesses and entrepreneurs in the South of the city may not be using the business and enterprise business support.
- It was questioned by members if there is anything that can be done at an earlier stage to encourage people to use the support of the council?
- Does the support from the council lessen over time?
- Bristol City Council focuses on business and business enterprise support in deprived areas and minority communities, should they have had more of a blanket approach?

Bristol City Council supports South Bristol with growth space and facilities – it becomes a problem when in South Bristol, people are not accessing and utilising this support.

A board member advised that they had received the following feedback after spending hours with business owners:

Over the first year is when they have their most engagement. Community partners do provide funding to engage customers but working with these organisations to start their business are limited - every 6 months there's a window to apply for grant funding, which has funded 165 people/community centres/organisations.

They do make referrals to other programmes but they are not always successful.

It was noted that there is a lot of enterprise in Southville but as you go more south, there are less businesses and more deprivation.

A board member asked do the council and the businesses come together with their business partners to explore how to help each other?

The board acknowledged the need for more focus groups.

The board was advised that the council are working on the improvement of 5 specific high streets across South Bristol to tackle housing issues in South Bristol areas, such as Bedminster or Filwood.

Each high street programme is specific to the high street, including improving shop fronts and access to commercial property grants up to 10k.

Presented by: Orlaith McGuinness, Pride of Place

OM advised of Pride of Place, which creates opportunity for employment as well as and supporting the VCSE sector.

Pride of Place initiative works across public and VCSE sectors, as well as businesses.

It was noted by board members that not all businesses can afford to be open to apprenticeships, a member suggested that there should be a scheme developed for smaller businesses to share one apprenticeship.

Consistent feedback from board members is that there are not enough apprenticeships, in the last quarter there were funded 56 apprenticeships - Apprenticeships amongst bigger companies often hold back.

Board members noted that there seems to be a pause in apprenticeship uptake due to national insurance contributions amongst small and big businesses, could this board target this? – if there is a demand, members suggested share of levy across businesses.

Big businesses such as Airbus have the facilities to host a conference or workshop with smaller businesses to encourage apprenticeship.

Board members noted that a lot of businesses find it's hard to make apprenticeships viable, yet, in places like Manchester, businesses must make commitment to sustain apprenticeships – could this be applied to Bristol?

Members noted it is not in WECA Good Business chart.

The Youth employment agenda interacts with both the young people agenda and family the support agenda, with an emphasis on early help and prevention, it is imperative that youth guarantee work is considered by both these agendas.

According to data, young people (NEETS) 42% of them live in South Bristol whereas only 21% live in East Central, showing that there is problem with young people not working in South Bristol.

The board explained there is a need for tailored support for NEETS, such as a place-based programme that utilises all feedback gathered,

Since May, there are targets to work with 130 young people by year 1.

91 of these young people are no longer NEETs, 15 employers actively involved, 6 people are actively employed and 5 have an apprenticeship.

OM explained that these young people often have undiagnosed SEND needs, which is why they feel so isolated from work.

Youth in South Bristol's biggest challenges are poverty, mental health and transport needs.

It was noted by the board if a young person starts an apprenticeship, their family could be at risk of losing their universal credit.

Apprenticeships are not a low skilled option, it is not possible to do this work from a universal POV, factoring in consequences of deprivation such as debt, housing, mental health and domestic violence.

University of Bristol are working with board training/filming with next phase of children.

Working with South Bristol Youth:

Pride of Place aims to hear more from young people, to theorise on how we plug the gap between South Bristol youth and youth around the city.

OM advised that they are in the process of planning year 2 with the combined authority and how this will be rolled out in the city - combined authority are reducing funding in the south and want to close delivery in 9 months and not 12.

3) What do current data and business insights tell us about Bristol's economy - and how should we respond together?

Anesa Kritah of Bristol City Council reported & presented slides:

Bristol's economic trends:

- A decline in employment rate from 78.5% to 77.6%
- An increase in benefit claims
- Modest wage growth that fails to match inflation
- Business startup rates are falling across the city and region, while survival rates are improving but unevenly distributed, especially in deprived areas.

ACTION – AK to review business survival data and assess clarity or alternative sources.

Sector performance shows growth in wholesale, retail, and finance, but lack of growth within entertainment and transport industries.

The Bristol Living Wage campaign focuses on low-paid sectors - this scheme faces challenges, with a net loss in accreditations

Board members also highlighted that there may be limited uptake of the Living Wage Scheme due to the requirement that corporates are headquartered within the city.

The board members drew concerns revolving inflation, investment delays and the lack of employment due to upcoming budget in November.

The VCSE sector was noted as a major employer with funding constraints, and social care was highlighted by members as an example of an occupation that often has insufficient wages.

ACTION – AK to investigate VCSE employment data and living wage compliance.

4) Update of Growth Strategy

Presented by Andy Reed, WECA:

There is a new, liberal, evidence-based strategy aimed at achieving 28% economic growth over the next decade.

This 10-year vision addresses barriers across government and regional levels; The West of England region demonstrates the strongest productivity outside London, though this is unevenly distributed.

The board discussed how infrastructure can help spread growth more equitably.

Five priority sectors have been identified for their growth potential: *advanced manufacturing, digital and technologies, clean energy industries, creative industries, and the everyday economy.*

Sixty-seven initial actions have been mapped out to support these sectors, as seen on the slides presented by Andy Reed.

The creation of a new Business Board that serves as a key route for engagement, intended to promote board membership across networks to strengthen the regional business voice was encouraged by members.

AR reported that there are five growth zones have been designated across the West of England

There are six sites within the Western Innovation Zones that have been picked for development.

It was noted by members that is hard to measure specifically productivity across the West of England, especially with employment:

- Bristol residents working in South Gloucestershire can skew figures
- Part-time job growth and student populations also complicate data.

A board member advised it may be helpful to compare this trend across other core cities.

AR advised that data currently reflects regional trends but lacks specificity; data shows Bristol's higher rates of ill health are contributing to lower productivity.

Board members had raised questions about whether high value jobs in the city centre are having to compensate.

Board members noted South Bristol is excluded from the Central Bristol growth zone despite appearing on maps, while the North Somerset gateway was seen as more accurate, reflecting the wider area of North Somerset and not just a portion as shown with the Central Bristol Growth Zone.

Board members advised that there may need to be a review of geographic boundaries based on need and deprivation.

On a regional level, any investment plans must ensure funding is directed to areas most in need, with South Bristol highlighted as a priority for targeted economic support.

5) How can the Economy & Skills Board shape and deliver the refreshed One City Plan?

Judith Langdon of One City reported:

The One City Breakfast on 22nd October will mark the formal launch of the plan and its transition into implementation, centred around four core missions.

- Equitable Economy
- Fair Life Chances for Young People
- Strong Connected Communities
- Resilient Climate and Nature

Each board is expected to select one mission and determine how they will contribute - these missions are cross-cutting and relevant to all boards.

ACTION – Board members to review all 4 missions and identify which specific mission the board most aligns with, and which board they could collaborate with to encourage this

A cross-board workshop will be organised to bring the boards together to come up with ideas, enabling boards to support one another and develop effective action plans.

As per the terms of reference, each board must take ownership of its action plan.

ACTION – JL to circulated invitations for the cross-board workshop.

6) AOB

No Other Business