

# Guide to support combined authority governance of post-pandemic policymaking

## Report authors

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# Introduction

How can combined authorities (CAs) alter their approach to governance for the post-pandemic recovery? Which partners will need to be involved, and how can they collaborate on the challenges and opportunities for regions? This [CfGS](#) guide sets out some examples of current activity, alongside practical suggestions to support CAs in planning and directing their governance and considering the most appropriate ways of working for the future.

This guide will be of specific interest for:

- CA officers;
- Members sitting on a CA;
- Officers and members of constituent authorities;
- Partner organisations working closely with CAs;
- National partners.

We think that this guide will also be of relevance for those with an interest in local governance and the devolution agenda.

## Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a monumental challenge to individuals, communities and organisations everywhere – yet it has also accelerated public service transformation in many areas, reinforcing a recognition that different tiers of governance cannot deliver services or tackle complex problems or ‘wicked issues’ in isolation.

Whilst the response phase required tactical thinking and quick decisive action, ensuring a sustainable recovery from the pandemic will demand a long-term strategic vision to support present needs, and those of future generations.

The recovery phase has presented an opportunity to reset longer term strategies, to build future resilience and respond to wider structural shifts brought about by the pandemic. What is clear so far in the forecasts, plans, and strategies being generated by CAs, is that recovery and long-term transformation will be impacted by the conditions under which regions and their different populations entered the pandemic.

CA governance has evolved and iterated over recent years to create a multi-layered system with responsibilities and remits often overlapping over geographical and organisational boundaries. Navigating this context at the best of times requires a consistent and co-ordinated approach, and the success of the local response throughout the pandemic was largely based upon having a single mission across all partners in an area, driving all resources in the same direction and towards a common goal.

Strong relationships, joined-up place leadership and collaborative practice has been fundamental to the response phase. In many cases, the far-reaching impacts of the pandemic led to a revitalisation of existing and new partnerships in localities and the involvement of organisations and networks across all segments of society. These efforts have entailed substantial joint-working between different public service providers, voluntary sector bodies and mutual aid groups.

Regional recovery will have to be delivered through collective action and partnership working, with the needs of local communities at the centre. Building on the role CAs played in the response phase, they will be able to use their wider influence to shape the regional agenda, promote positive system-wide working and provide a shared framework for the recovery.

Activity on a local, sub-regional and regional footprint will happen within a framework set by national policy and funding. The nature of CA recovery planning and approaches to governance will also need to account for how CAs and the Government will work together and negotiate any conflicts to deliver shared aims and ambitions for regions within upcoming legislation. The Government's policies on 'building back better' and the expected White Paper on 'levelling up' can be expected to be central to this.

## CA specific challenges

The complex and deep-rooted issues facing regions require systemic solutions, and whilst CAs have legitimacy in areas such as economic development, it is not always clear about the added value CAs can bring to recovery priorities outside of their more traditional commitments. However, CAs are uniquely positioned to play a fundamental role in strategic leadership for the recovery, by working collaboratively with partners to plan for, and act on, the long-term shocks that will affect the economy, society, and environment.

As the scope and remit of CAs has grown, the workforce has, in many localities, had to expand and establish specialist project teams to manage funding and deliver on key priorities. It is essential for CAs to have the right capacity and skills to deliver across cross-cutting topics and governance systems built on partnership working to bring it about. Especially as the pace and intensity of work required to realise the full ambitions of the post-pandemic recovery may require increased expertise, and certainly greater collaboration in aligning current resources and capacity.

Whilst CAs play a strategic role covering broad areas of public policy, their legal powers do not match this scope. Although some do have broad powers under individual devolution deals, it's fair to say that the scale of individual CAs' ambitions means that they're likely to need to reach out to others to achieve these. CAs' complex institutional architectures involve many statutory and non-statutory organisations and partnerships to deliver their programmes. Hence, the post-pandemic approach to CA governance will need to bring together elements of wider strategies across constituent councils, and partners, all within the framework and constraints of national policies.

There are of course differences in CA responsibilities and commitments across the board, so their role in planning and directing the pandemic recovery and broader economic development in their area will also vary. Despite this, there is a strong degree of consistency in the ambitions of CAs in leading the recovery, securing long-term prosperity and stability, and achieving transformative change for their areas. So, there are many common considerations that will need to be made and approaches that can be taken.

CAs have a clear role in co-ordinating a regional economic strategy, providing leadership and a voice to area in working with Government, as well as specific obligations that CAs are under further to their individual devolution deals. The Government has made a series of announcements around the themes of 'building back better' and 'levelling up' between more affluent and poorer regions. Clarity of intent from Government regarding these national policy priorities would help CAs go even further in turning the vision and goals set out in local recovery plans into lasting action.

A great deal of success in the response phase has rested on the scale of additional resources that CAs have been able to access, and through emergency Government funding, and a deepening and development of existing relationships within CA areas. However, there is the uncertainty of how CAs will be adequately funded in the future with the current model heavily reliant on competitive bidding for funding pots which compounds the problem of long-term planning and coordination across wide geographies. This has implications for effective governance – particularly around long-term planning.

The challenge ahead for CAs will centre around how economic development policy meets regional post-pandemic needs and the transition to a more inclusive, healthy, and green economy. These considerations will have to be made within the wider macro-economic and political context – and at a time when resources are limited and future funding uncertain.

## Who is involved in post-pandemic recovery at the CA level?

The way that CAs work with partners and key stakeholders during the recovery will need to ensure that lessons learnt from the pandemic are built in and local opportunities are seized. By looking at overlapping responsibilities, shared aims and working relationships between partners within CA areas it is possible to provide an indication of how these organisations could work in complementary ways.

The holding of responsibility, and leadership, between CAs, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Local Authorities, and other local partners, risks appearing complex. Governance structures and accountabilities can overlap. Although collaboration and partnership working are central to success, individual responsibility and accountability is important to identify – who leads, on what issues, at what time. This will clearly be different from place to place, recognising that each locality will have its own challenges and opportunities (this difference is after all the point of devolution).

The governance scheme will often set out how things work in principle, but the reality can look messier. In this respect, being clear about the CA recovery agenda and how it relates to existing statutory mechanisms is essential.

Carrying out the necessary groundwork and formulating governance arrangements for post-pandemic policymaking will require achieving consensus and buy-in across a range of partners, with Government, and across local authorities - each with its own political make up and priorities. It may also cover more than one LEP area and the CA board could include a number of non-statutory members. Additionally, there will be the crucial task of CAs developing relationships with Government and having certain discussions at the right level to attract funding streams.

It will also be essential for CA scrutiny to play a part in shaping and testing the recovery. Scrutiny will need to be outcome-focused, and understand the approach that the mayor and CA, and their partners, plan to take to deliver it.

There is still pressure across the system in CA areas, and workloads for many partners are greater than pre-pandemic. The scale of the challenges being presented to partners is remarkable; alongside ongoing restructuring, reorganisation and funding changes creating further issues, notably within the health and care sector and the VCSE sector.

Mutual understanding and trust between diverse stakeholders – including businesses and industry, civil society, science, and academia – will have an essential role to play in sharing information, mobilising resources, providing solutions, and giving voice to the concerns and needs of under-represented communities.

### **What could this look like in practice?**

- Meaningful discussions of CA priorities – and attempts to align them to the priorities of others within a broader region – may need to draw in a greater range of partners than at present. This will vary from area to area, perhaps becoming less of a driver where a CA most clearly operates as a “functional economic area”.
- Identify which partners are best placed to lead on certain issues relating to the recovery and establish the common responsibilities and priorities on which activity can be focussed.
- Bring partners in on an equal footing, all united around clear objectives to develop a coherent narrative for places.
- As organisations transition to recovery, there may well be changes to personnel so mapping out stakeholders, determining how to build key relationships and identifying who has the power to influence or support decisions every level of the decision-making process will be vital.
- The role of the VSCE sector and local anchor institutions has taken a central position in supporting pandemic response and recovery efforts. Looking ahead CAs will have to consider how to support and harness the value of these local organisations.

## **How can these partners work together to collaborate?**

The unique nature of CA governance does tend to focus on a place-based approach, working with partners to deliver change, rather than siloed organisationally driven goals. The post-pandemic approach to governance in CA areas will need to capitalise on this, by building on the relationships and trust established in responding to the pandemic.

The upside of the pandemic has taught us some interesting lessons about governance - in a crisis situation people are prepared to do things differently, bureaucratic procedures are relaxed, decision-making is streamlined, organisations are less risk adverse and local actors unite around priorities for their communities. Some of these changes point the way to innovations which can be made permanent. But some may remove crucial safeguards, which need to be rebuilt once the crisis is over.

Often the success of collaboration comes down to relational aspects of governance that cut across organisational structures. CA political leadership and senior officer leadership will set the tone for how personal relationships and ways of working are to be conducted with all local partners and stakeholders for the post-pandemic recovery.

Recovery planning has a key role to play in effectively preparing for the future, resisting a retreat into business-as-usual models, and driving system change. This will inevitably be a phased process, with immediate work focused on adapting and transitioning and longer-term work focused on reimagining and transformation. It is important to highlight that CAs won't have the luxury of

stopping, reflecting, changing, and then starting again. The recovery will overlap with ongoing operational delivery.

The prioritisation framework below reflects the phased process to the post-pandemic recovery by adopting a considered and reflective governance approach in thinking about, and acting on, improvement needs. This framing is not simply a retrospective tool, it can continue to be relevant and useful as CAs consider how they might change their approach.



*Prioritisation Framework: from diagram developed by RSA, adapted by Barry Quirk CEO, Chief Executive of Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; and additional detail from Cheshire West and Chester Council recovery plan.*

## What could this look like in practice?

- Determine what functions (including advocacy, strategy, planning and delivery) it makes sense to discharge at CA and local scales.
- Clearly identifying the activity that the CA will lead on, and where it will support local authorities at the level of delivery, as well as building in regular communication can help with managing the governance implications of overlapping responsibilities, and associated disagreements.
- The recovery process will also be driven by local political priorities, and CAs will have the task of finding commonalities within the agenda, resources, and targets of their constituent authorities.
- Establishing dedicated workstreams on certain recovery priorities can ensure all parties are fully engaged and that activity retains momentum. This may necessitate a consideration about how CAs develop sector-specific recovery plans.
- These workstreams could operate on a 'task and finish group' basis and relevant councillors, officers, partners, experts, and members of the public could be represented in the membership. It will also be important to keep clear lines of communication and establish protocols to support collaborative working.
- Leading with local knowledge, embedding data and spatial mapping, plays a key role in developing an understanding of which solutions would be most suitable in different areas.
- Listening to different voices will be critical for ensuring an inclusive and sustainable recovery, maintaining public engagement through the CA website, social media channels and mayoral appearances can communicate progress and secure support.

## Alignment and integration

A significant programme of work is now underway across CAs to begin, and continue, the actions in their recovery plans - with all agencies, partners and networks considering what the plans mean for them, and the appropriate next steps required in response to delivering on those commitments. It will be important for all to have clarity around roles and responsibilities, with CAs being clear on what they will convene, lead, and deliver.

Different CA priorities may be seen as the remit of external partners, in which CAs will have a stake and play a convening role, but delivery may largely rest with outside bodies. In some areas CA recovery activity may be led by local authorities and their partners but plans at the CA level can articulate a powerful shared story and consolidate separate local priorities into a set of missions for the region.

There is strength from this focus on partnership – in shared vision and direction. But there is also risk, that a distinctive vision for a given area could be diluted by the need to reach agreement between a diverse set of partners. This could result in “priorities” which are nationally homogenous – particularly if Government has its own keenly-expressed priorities for local areas to work on. This central governance challenge is only now beginning to be explored in some CA areas – particularly those which have seen a change in Mayoralty in 2021.

Approaches to governance will have to continue the progress that has been made throughout the pandemic relating to ways of working, improving relationships between system partners, and taking more agile approach to risk, governance and bureaucracy. Of course, this will involve making some of those changes permanent, and others not.

CA recovery planning should reflect the composition, strengths and weaknesses of functional economic geographies, but it will also have to accept the ‘messiness’ of administrative boundaries, and perhaps divergent local political priorities. CAs may also have to recognise that, potentially, some of those geographies may have shifted in ways that we don’t yet understand.

Within the CA post-pandemic strategic framework, there will need to be an expectation of different sectors of the economy and different geographies moving at different speeds due to varying local circumstances. Beyond a potential lack of consensus between constituent authorities, coordination may also be hindered due to competitive tensions or due to disagreements over how funds won by the CA are then distributed between councils.

There is a risk of potential duplication in recovery planning, with examples of lower tier councils producing their own documents as well as the CA or LEP area within which they sit also carrying out parallel work. This is not to say that the regional level is the only appropriate level for recovery planning - taking local decisions must be based on a deep understanding of place, however, plans and the resources involved will benefit from alignment and integration. In some areas this alignment and integration will not be clear-cut.

- West Yorkshire CA (WYCA) has established a West Yorkshire Jobs Taskforce, to bring key stakeholders together to plan for the skills needed in the region, and to identify the jobs that are available as well as the pathways to them.
- In Bristol they have differentiated between measures that are wholly owned by Bristol City Council and are direct measures of their performance, and region-wide measures where they are a key player, but performance is dependent on other partners such as West of England CA (WECA). It is one of Bristol’s corporate

priorities to work with WECA to align city priorities to regional strategies and to support delegated decision making and delivery.

- Considering Barnsley's geography in relation to CAs, their local authority recovery plan reflects its position as an integral part of the Sheffield City Region (SCR) and is also aligned with the nearby WYCA.
- The regional North East LEP recovery strategy has been developed with both North of Tyne CA (NTCA) as well as the North East CA (NECA), which has helped inform and co-ordinate the local authority plans that sit within this area.
- The Greater Manchester CA (GMCA) Living with Covid Recovery Plan was developed last year with the VCSE sector playing a major role – both in the delivery of key actions, but also in driving forward a number of the tasks identified in the plan around volunteering, mutual aid, emergency support, and social value.

As in the examples above, many local authority recovery plans will sit alongside, and are intended to dovetail with, the plans set out by their CAs and LEPs. However, it should be highlighted that this kind of alignment is dependent upon shared understanding and positive working relationships between local political leaders, it can easily become mismatched or unproductive if tensions are not managed.

CAs have found strength where they are intertwined with or well connected to the LEP(s) in their region, giving them greater insight into local business and technologies. In some cases, it might be advantageous for neighbouring CAs to collaborate in regional recovery plans. Aside from other CAs and LEPs, there is also the opportunity for recovery planning to happen in wider partnership.

Recovery planning can also provide a bridge between the existing or pre-pandemic CA strategy and the post-pandemic refresh of these documents. Plans may be limited to the CA area, or they may complement or be integrated into plans developed at a wider regional level. Particularly if those plans tie into bigger infrastructure plans – HS2, the RIS2 roads plans, Northern Powerhouse Rail, OxCam arc, etc.

Many existing strategies, long term plans and aspirations will still stand, and a single recovery plan will not be able to capture everything that will be delivered in the next year or so in CA areas. Instead, many of the recovery plans and system changes will directly shape and inform the refresh of future CA strategy and set out where the whole system has a role to play in their delivery.

## **Responsive and creative solutions**

Post-pandemic CA governance and policy making will need to be flexible (with spare capacity to accommodate disruption), resilient, resourceful, reflective, inclusive, and integrated. There is an opportunity for CAs to use lessons learnt from the crisis as a governance 'experiment', through greater collective innovation, cooperation, and coordination. This links to the previous prioritisation framework on page 6.

CAs can lead and drive change across systems. The pandemic forced innovation and significant shifts in the ways services are designed, delivered, and accessed. The novel operating models developed as part of the CA response need to be embedded and developed as the recovery continues.



There are a range of strategic tools to support CA recovery governance and policymaking:

- **Scenario planning:** developing multiple stories of how the future could look to explore and learn implications for the present. This also includes developing an image of an ideal (or undesirable) future state and working backwards to identify what steps to take (or avoid).
- **Horizon scanning:** seeking and researching signals of change in the present and their potential future impacts.
- **Megatrends analysis:** exploring and reviewing large-scale changes and interpreting these emerging trends that can build on existing sector strengths.

The need for accurate and dynamic data insights throughout the crisis has also led to much greater sharing of data held by different agencies to help to co-ordinate and target services. Recognising potential constraints in capacity and capability to gather and analyse data, some CAs have formed effective partnerships to share data insights. It continues to be important for CAs to monitor the recovery in their economies and vital that data feeds into existing decision-making structures.

- In West Midlands CA (WMCA) the Office for Data Analytics compiles a Weekly Economic Monitor to feed into its Economic Impact Group meetings. It draws on contributions from a wide range of regional partners including LEPs, Growth Hubs and local universities. The Mayor sets the agenda and a couple of days prior to the meeting and the Office of Data Analytics pulls together intelligence that will help the Economic Impact Group understand what is happening on the topics to be covered. The report focuses on emerging issues rather than trying to be comprehensive.
- In Liverpool City Region (LCR) they have embedded co-design and active engagement in their recovery pathway. This will include implementing an LCR “Living Lab” approach to explore, co-create and test new ideas and solutions to the economy’s challenges through more participatory approaches to policy making. In LCR they have also established the Social and Solidarity Economy Reference Panel to help amplify the voice of community organisations and social businesses and develop volunteering approach which builds on the response to COVID-19.

The pandemic raised the profile of CA mayors in providing a great voice for regions. Mayors have the platform to reinforce messages on recovery priorities and ensure there is a positive dialogue and sharing of information with local authorities, business representative groups other regional stakeholders, central Government, and residents.

Strengthening participative and deliberative democracy could also help support the mayoral project in CA areas. Alongside their direct powers, mayors possess ‘soft power’, such as their democratic mandate and relationships civil society and businesses, which enables them to adopt innovative and locally appropriate approaches to the post-pandemic recovery.

## How can risks and constraints be understood and managed?

Many issues have increased in scale and complexity, and across the system CAs and partners will need to think about how these changes are incorporated into elements of ongoing delivery for the recovery.

A bold vision for change, and a strategy to achieve that change also requires clear outcomes and measures of success. There is a risk that strategies and plans do not include numerical targets or sufficient clarity around how interventions and resources being deployed relate to high-level strategic objectives. This is difficult given uncertainty to be able to develop targets with confidence – which has knock-on implications for accountability and governance. Without visibility on the scale and nature of the interventions being delivered it will be impossible to judge whether these objectives can be achieved.

- In WYCA each of the committees of the CA will now be taking forward discussions on relevant elements of the recovery plan, and how they will be delivered through the work programmes of those committees. This will help support further refinement the plan, particularly in relation to the actions that will be supported through regional intervention and collaboration with partners.
- In LCR the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested a breakdown of the elements in the recovery plan showing what the City Region was going to spend money on, any commitment being entered into, and the inclusion of any partnership funding. The Mayor has recognised “the role played by Scrutiny is fundamental in helping to convince Government that we have our house in order”.

It will also be important for CAs to set out a commitment to creating accessible and accountable mechanisms which represent a holistic picture of economic, social, and environmental health for CA scrutiny, and indeed local residents, to hold their mayor to account. In addition to CA scrutiny, there is also an opportunity to explore new forms of accountability for meaningful oversight of the recovery that can dock-in to current arrangements, and that is better suited to involving the public.

Throughout the pandemic there have been significant examples of the system being better able to focus on the needs of local residents. CAs will need to consider how the shifts towards community action can be nurtured to be part of a broader reframing of the role of citizen and state.

One challenge CAs will face is around knowing what recovery or future prosperity means for the people whose quality of life they are trying to enhance. In their approach to governance, it will be important that the improvements made in listening to, and acting with, communities are sustained, and that resident views are inserted into decision-making processes. Building and maintaining meaningful and sustainable public engagement takes time and money, so CA projects will need to secure the specific skills and resources that will work best in particular place.

CA and local authority action may also experience significant barriers due to a lack of funding, capacity, or expertise to effectively approach the priorities outlined for the recovery. Risks to progress may also emerge from different governance arrangements, problems with organisational culture, individual personality clashes, a lack of shared priorities or past conflicts.

It might be appropriate for CAs to review the governance arrangements for their existing responsibilities and programmes to ensure there is enough capacity to deliver on commitments, and to prepare for any additional funding and projects outlined in their recovery plans. There will probably need to be an emphasis on flexible systems that enable streamlining and harmonisation of business processes and are able to adapt to any future organisational changes.

It is critical for CAs to retain the capacity to deliver against their longer-term goals with mechanisms to channel funding to the places and enterprises that need it, as well as the discretionary budgets available to accelerate this work.

### **What could this look like in practice?**

- Develop comprehensive, clear, and robust plans, setting out how aims will be achieved, who is responsible, and how success will be measured can keep recovery progress on track. It is likely that plans will need to be dynamic, living documents, redeveloped annually with the support of all partners from local public and private organisations.
- Build in moments for shared learning and reflection. This can be scheduled onto meeting agendas or done on a more informal basis.
- Identifying risks to delivering CA recovery commitments, providing information on mitigation measures (alongside owners of mitigation actions), and showing direction of travel of each risk since the last reporting period can bolster accountability and transparency.
- CA scrutiny can help understand these risks and constraints to delivering the post-pandemic recovery. This could be through overseeing the development and implementation of economic recovery plans; reviewing the local community impact of major investment plans; evaluating how the CA prioritises decisions on major investments; or looking at the ways in which individuals and organisations are engaged and involved in the decision-making process.
- Review and refresh existing CA governance structures to ensure they enable flexibility whilst providing accountability. It may also be useful to assess committee terms of reference, as well as the priorities that make their way onto the work programmes and agendas of meetings – so that they are in line with the wider strategic focus of the CA. This presents a capacity challenge. CAs have generally been comparative lean organisations, and the task at hand may require both more capacity, and different skillsets to those currently present. In particular, the development of political skills amongst senior officers, and those leading on major projects, may be a priority in a more febrile atmosphere.
- Understand the resources available, the type and level of provision already offered, or needed, and to make decisions on what should be procured. In addition, it may be necessary to review ongoing provider delivery, which will in turn inform future funding decisions.

# What priorities should partners collaborate on, and how might this work?

As part of recovery planning and approaches to governance, CAs are reviewing their priorities in light of the impacts evidenced by the pandemic and the ambitions they wish to achieve.

In addition to planning the recovery over the short to medium term, CA governance and policy making will be looking to develop longer-term recovery plans for their localities. These will need to respond to the cross-cutting impacts of the pandemic, assert regional priorities and address other national policy priorities including 'levelling up' and net zero.

If CAs are to help drive the recovery, there will need to be a way to develop long-term growth models, and to encourage local partners to put social and natural infrastructure on the same footing as physical infrastructure. One of the most positive takeaways from the pandemic response has been understanding the need and value of local goods and resources as well as community-based support and interventions.

Priorities will of course vary for different CAs but approaches to governance will benefit from providing the opportunity to bring forward a system wide conversation about future strategies, reducing inequalities, and providing equality of opportunities. As CAs rise to their regional challenges, there will inevitably be calls upon Government to support and amplify efforts with new investment and wider powers to secure a sustainable recovery.

Whilst many principles of social and economic development will still apply in underpinning a post-pandemic recovery, the landscape in which this transformation needs to take place has significantly shifted. CAs are uniquely able to facilitate collaboration, support alignment and mobilise resources between local partners. Effective prioritisation of ambitions and acknowledging the capacity and capabilities in CAs and local partner organisations will be important during recovery planning and delivery.

Some recovery strategies set out specific commitments to spend in programmes across the locality. Others have acknowledged that additional resources will be needed and state their intention to factor these into future business planning. Hence, some recovery strategies have doubled up as requests for funding support. This could be due to a hesitancy from some, given the uncertainty around the White Paper, or areas could be taking the opportunity to present their recovery plans to focus discussions with Government on what regions need.

- WMCA's recovery plan represents a reshaping of its earlier Local Industrial Strategy and focuses on green manufacturing, health care and high-speed rail-related projects that would have an immediate impact but will require securing additional funding.
- In NTCA, the Inclusive Economy Board was launched in March 2020 and advises Cabinet on how to better integrate and strengthen education, skills, and employment interventions to improve local outcomes for residents. It is independently chaired and brings together regional and national representatives from business, civil society, education, academia, and Government Departments.

In addition to focusing on productivity, inward investment, and the economic models of growth, CAs have also committed to delivering social justice, including what matters to local communities, such as health and wellbeing, environmental sustainability and the public being more involved in decisions affecting their areas. It's also important to recognise there isn't a split down political lines here – all have committed to these themes to a greater or lesser extent.

As CAs seek to expand their scope and impact beyond their traditional focus on economic development, the role they play in delivering these priorities is an issue that needs to be addressed.

### What could this look like in practice?

- Previous assumptions will need to be tested and emerging priorities will need to be built into planning and delivery.
- Developing and maintaining an understanding of the regional economy and the impacts of the pandemic in the area will be critical in addressing the interconnected priorities.
- CA recovery will need to be place sensitive, identifying the differentiated support needed for sectors of the economy and communities across the region.
- Co-designing and delivering with local organisations will be central in successfully targeting support for those most in need.
- Connecting significant support programmes to formal decision-making structures can enable CAs to build community power into local economic solutions.
- Part of this will involve insight from the VCSE sector and cross-sector collaboration with clear local policy and goals – with a particular focus on evidence-gathering.
- CAs will need to engage with local (and emerging) Integrated Care Boards, and Partnerships, on the wider determinants of health.
- In their approach to governance CAs will have to avoid confusing messaging, bring residents with them on the journey to recovery and ensure that other big local organisations, both in the public and private sector, are on board as well.
- Key to the approach of achieving any of the cross-cutting priorities in the post-pandemic recovery is that plans do not occur as separate or conflicting programmes of work, but as joined up entities.

The table below captures the main priorities set out by CAs in their post-pandemic recovery plans.

|  | <b>Priorities / principles / workstreams</b>   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>GMCA</b></p> <p><a href="#"><u>GM Living with Covid Resilience Plan - 2020</u></a></p> | <p>The plan takes account of Greater Manchester's overarching principles which were determined early on in our response to the pandemic, and continue to shape and guide the development of our Living with Covid Resilience Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inequalities / poverty</li> <li>▪ Safe GM / standards</li> <li>▪ Co-design, civil society, and social infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Building a confident city-region</li> <li>▪ Resilient city-region</li> <li>▪ Recovery in the context of GMS (opportunities to achieve our aims faster; risks to achieving our aims)</li> <li>▪ Behaviour change</li> </ul> |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>LCR</b></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Building Back Better - 2020</u></a></p>                                     | <p>We will make our aspiration to #BuildBackBetter by linking our support to our values. We commit to the following six principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Principle One: A truly inclusive creative economy</li> <li>▪ Principle Two: Social value</li> <li>▪ Principle Three: Environmental sustainability</li> <li>▪ Principle Four: Health, wellbeing, and equality</li> <li>▪ Principle Five: Meaningful engagement with our communities</li> <li>▪ Principle Six: A City Region that can project itself internationally through its cultural, sporting, and natural assets</li> </ul>                                |
| <p><b>WMCA</b></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Levelling Up the West Midlands - 2020</u></a></p>                          | <p>Six citizen priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Living safely with coronavirus</li> <li>▪ Accessing healthcare and improving physical health</li> <li>▪ Mental health support and awareness</li> <li>▪ Education and young people</li> <li>▪ Jobs and training</li> <li>▪ Local businesses and high streets</li> </ul> <p>The Citizens' Panel identified 4 principles to steer our approach to community recovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extra help to the most affected</li> <li>▪ Environmental focus</li> <li>▪ Innovation and creativity</li> <li>▪ Transparency and citizen voice</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>WECA</b></p> <p><a href="#"><u>West of England Recovery Plan - 2020</u></a></p>                           | <p>The task force agreed the following principles for recovery, which form the five pillars of our plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rebuilding business</li> <li>▪ Getting residents back into jobs</li> <li>▪ Strengthening inclusion</li> <li>▪ Supporting a Green recovery</li> <li>▪ Renewing places</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>NECA &amp; NTCA</b></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Recovery and Renewal Deal for the North East - 2020</u></a></p> | <p>Our plan is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To keep people in jobs and training</li> <li>▪ To support businesses and sectors to restart and recover</li> <li>▪ To support the transition of our communities and places as they adapt to living with COVID-19.</li> <li>▪ To build the future economy by maximising the potential of our existing assets and exploring new opportunities</li> <li>▪ To invest in digital and transport connectivity</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>SCR</b></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Renewal Action Plan - 2020</u></a></p>                                      | <p>Support is target around three areas of action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People – supporting people adapt to the new economy and be better able to fill higher-skilled jobs</li> <li>▪ Employers – supporting businesses to adapt, survive and thrive in the new environment</li> </ul>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Places – stimulating the local economy to create jobs and transform places.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>WYCA</b><br><br><a href="#">West Yorkshire Economic Recovery Plan - 2021</a> | <p>Our plan is about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a fair and just recovery for all</li> <li>a lasting recovery for all</li> </ul> <p>We are using these two golden threads because they are important to everything we do and will support our efforts to build a resilient region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>inclusive growth</li> <li>tackling the climate emergency</li> </ul>  |
| <b>CPCA</b><br><br><a href="#">Local Economic Recovery Strategy - 2021</a>      | <p>We have identified three phases of action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Response</li> <li>Recover and rebound</li> <li>Renewal and future growth</li> </ul> <p>Our missions for these phases are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help people at risk of unemployment by accelerating retraining and upskilling</li> <li>Build back faster by accelerating start-ups, scale ups and set ups</li> <li>Build back better and greener by accelerating high tech jobs and cluster growth, focussing on green, digital, and net zero technologies</li> </ul> |

From these examples in the table there are a few broad themes that can be captured and are expanded upon in the next section. The main pillars are broadly the same but the context beneath them is extremely different – so it’s possible to look at CAs plans and erroneously think that they’re pursuing more of the same when there’s actually been a sizeable shift.

It must be stated that these are cross-cutting themes and achieving progress in one area will inevitably contribute to the objectives in another.

## Stabilising local economies

Whilst most CA geographies are based around a greater city region, or are polycentric, some have an asymmetric structure with parts of their footprint dominated by cities, and the rest by smaller towns and rural areas – this will likely result in differentiated support needed for sectors of the economy and communities across the region. Under new county deals there is likely to be a move towards more having this sort of asymmetric structure, with devolution signalled in Somerset, Cumbria, and Yorkshire, and more detail expected to be contained in the highly anticipated Levelling Up White Paper.

The social and economic consequences of the national lockdowns and varied restrictions across different parts of the country subjected different business sectors classed as ‘non-essential’ to the most severe impacts, but all industrial and service sectors have been affected in some way. High streets and local businesses have been hard hit by the reduction in footfall and closures during the lockdown and there have been rises in unemployment and disruption to education.

The post pandemic economic picture is mixed – with headline metrics indicating a return to growth for some sectors, but with many businesses still dealing with uncertainty. Impacts are also being felt in less visible parts of the local economy – and in ways that are unpredictable. Whilst the current position for some businesses may be okay, order books could be looking uncertain, driven by supply chain challenges, employment difficulties and Brexit consequences.

All CA recovery plans make reference to driving economic growth, investing in infrastructure, and creating more opportunities for the future. Even where CAs talk about “economic growth” this will most likely mean stabilisation – and finding certainty and consistency.

In most plans this centres on investment in skills and training to match emerging employment opportunities, and the development of transport infrastructure, housing, and digital connectivity.

- In NTCA they are building a pipeline of investment projects such as clean energy and green growth in readiness for accelerated Government funding, as well as ensuring there are enough incentives to attract investment to the region.
- WECA sets out an emphasis on unlocking new jobs and opportunities within its area through fiscal interventions that are about both building infrastructure and stimulating new economic activity to grow businesses in the region.
- In LCR’s recovery plan there is a recognition of the role that other anchor institutions, particularly universities, will play in contributing to local economic development strategies and creating knowledge and creative industries.

Making progress with these kinds of priorities also need to be reflected in the CAs approach to governance – bringing communities and partners together to shape a new shared vision for place-based prosperity. This means reaching the widest possible audience, working with all the different groups within the region to give them a voice in decisions, and ensuring that diverse needs are met in ways that are practical and inclusive.

The pandemic has also highlighted the value of local supply chains and procurement frameworks, and in most CA recovery plans there is a focus on inward investment. Through recognition of their own role as ‘anchor institutions’ CAs can drive significant investment and purchasing within their area to create opportunities and lessen inequalities.

Undoubtedly CAs will also be looking for initiatives and funding opportunities that put their regions at an advantage compared to other areas. By developing and maintaining an understanding of the regional economy and the impacts of the pandemic in their area, CAs will be critical in addressing the interconnected priorities of poverty, ill health, social isolation, and inequality within different local economies and creating the conditions for an equitable recovery.

## Tackling inequalities

Prior to the pandemic, there were already entrenched and persisting inequalities across England. But these inequalities may now present themselves in different ways. The long-standing problems of regional inequality have become ever clearer during the past two years, and the impact of the



pandemic has had a strong regional element with disproportionately high impacts on the most deprived areas.

CA recovery plans set out a wide range of actions to address underlying structural causes of inequality, as well as ensuring the hardest hit people and communities get the support they need, preventing existing inequalities from widening, and, in the long-term closing the gap.

Different population groups will require tailored, additional support, as the full extent of the challenges becomes clear. In the governance approach to tackling inequalities, aiming to co-design and deliver with local organisations will be central in successfully targeting support for the communities most in need. Much of this will need to rest on understanding how equality/inequality has shifted as a result of the experience of the past eighteen months.

For economic interventions to address inequalities, CAs will have to involve local people in a meaningful way. In addition, where support is needed it will need to be connected to the principal structures where decisions are taken and from the largest sources to leverage funding, enabling CAs to build community power into local economic solutions.

Part of this will involve continued support of the VCSE sector and cross-sector collaboration with clear local policy and goals – with a particular focus on evidence-gathering.

- WMCA's recovery plan has recognised the contribution of small businesses and social enterprise in providing vital goods and services, creating work, and supporting thriving places - the plan commits to doubling the size of its social economy in the next 10 years.
- In WYCA, the recovery plan identifies the importance of 'Social Value' to inclusive growth and achieving this in delivery of the plan will include setting out how social value will be enhanced through contracts, including that any businesses that receive grants from the products delivered as part of the plan would be required to contribute to Inclusive Growth actions and outcomes via their funding agreements.

The nature of the crisis has heightened the focus on health and wellbeing. Health and other inequalities are intrinsically linked - poor health outcomes inhibit the number of people able to work, either directly or through caring responsibilities, and this presents social, economic, and financial challenges for localities.

The joint commitment, energy, and resources of CAs and relevant partners is needed for there to be any chance of reducing health inequalities. Partners need a relentless focus on prevention, health inequalities and tackling the social determinants of health. CA and local health and care system partnerships have matured through their joint focus on responding to the pandemic and there is optimism that this will lead to a reinvigorated joint focus on health and care integration, prevention and tackling health inequalities going forward.

A continued push for integrated health and social care in CA areas can help to identify and address underlying weaknesses in the system. There is also a big opportunity for CAs to engage with local (and emerging) Integrated Care Boards, and Partnerships, on the wider determinants of health. But it is important that CAs do not 'overreach', recognising they are not health bodies, but their best contribution to tackling health inequalities is to promote job creation and develop relevant skills.

## Creating sustainable localities

CAs, local authorities and other partners will need to cooperate on designing and planning places that are environmentally sustainable. CA mayors' remit of transport and housing, sectors that contribute significantly to carbon emissions, makes them obvious partners to lead on achieving climate targets. While this is clearly a significant challenge, it also presents major opportunities to build resilience, grow businesses, develop skills, and benefit communities.

Even before the pandemic the climate emergency was high on the political agenda for many CA areas. Whilst lockdowns initially made a positive contribution to reduced emissions, long-term the impacts may adversely affect the pace and scale of achieving net zero carbon targets.

CA recovery plans focus on making positive long-term contributions to tackling the climate emergency and achieving wider environmental sustainability. This includes reducing emissions deriving from the CA's own activities, whilst also setting out activities across the CA areas to reduce emissions and to encourage others to do so.

CAs use a range of terminology relating to environmental goals, some CA approaches to the recovery cite creating a 'circular economy' to increase energy efficiency and reduce waste. But all make reference to developing the local economy in an environmentally sustainable way and achieving 'net zero carbon emissions' – albeit within slightly different timeframes.

In their approach to governance CAs will also have to bring residents with them on the journey to net-zero and ensure that other big local organisations, both in the public and private sector, are on board as well and seek to avoid confusing messaging. Public awareness and engagement are key to effecting change in this area. Due to their wide geography, CAs can reach a significant portion of the public, and they can work with local authorities' proximity to communities in influencing behaviours that support more environmentally sustainable living.

Measures to tackle climate change and to improve health almost always share compatible aims. Fully aligning the environmental and health prevention and improvement agendas at place, system and CA level will bring mutual opportunities and make best use of resources.

Key to the approach of achieving climate goals with the post-pandemic recovery is that plans do not occur as separate or conflicting programmes of work, but as joined up entities. CAs will be committed to delivering better transport infrastructure and affordable housing to drive economic growth, but this must also support creating sustainable localities.