

Coast to Capital

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Dear Coast to Capital Local Authority Chief Executive,

We have already been in close contact with you and your teams over the last couple of weeks, as the impact of the COVID emergency on our region and our economy becomes clear.

I wanted to write to summarise the work that we have been doing to try and mitigate the impact that the Government's shutdown is having on the region's businesses and workers, and to set out some suggestions on what we do next to drive preparations for the recovery phase.

As you know, Coast to Capital has successfully transitioned to a dispersed working model, which we will be able to sustain for as long as is necessary. My staff and I are all working hard to deliver our Business Plan for the year ahead. We will be writing to you separately to share this with you and ask for your contribution to our operating costs for 2020/21, which as ever will be much appreciated.

As an organisation, I believe that we are establishing ourselves as one of the most effective LEPs in the country. We can see that through the quality of our Board, and our ability to deliver. For example we are on track to fully spend our £300 million Local Growth Fund allocation, we are playing a leading role in the Southern LEPs group to represent our wider region with Ministers, and we operate to the highest standards of governance and transparency as expected of us. I am delighted to let you know that in our Annual Performance Review Government has awarded us an Exceptional for Governance, along with a Good for Delivery and Achieved for strategy. This is a really strong result for us and I am proud of the team who have worked so hard to achieve this.

But COVID poses a significant new challenge to the region. As you know, we have already taken a series of actions to try and mitigate the immediate impact of the lockdown:

- We have established that our region is one of the immediately hardest hit in England, and have been lobbying Government hard on the importance of supporting our regional economy to rebound in order to support the national recovery.
- We have created a new £2 million Backing Business Fund to help businesses adapt and respond to the crisis. We were the first and one of only two LEPs to do this across the whole country. We have paused acceptance of new applications due to the overwhelmingly positive response from local businesses to allow our team to efficiently sift and allocate funding. Over 400 businesses completed the eligibility checklist and we expect the first payments to be made before the Easter weekend
- We have more than doubled the number of staff working in the Coast to Capital Growth Hub and activated our network of Growth Champions – to ensure that as many small businesses and entrepreneurs as possible can get free support and advice on how to respond to the crisis.

Looking forward, we are keen to do even more as quickly as possible:

- We will be urgently seeking more funding for our Backing Business Fund and flexibility to use all the funds available us to have the most impact where it is needed the most.
- We will be using the evidence from businesses that we have engaged with, to help Government tailor its own package of interventions to support the regional economy.
- We will be focusing our efforts on the key sectors of our economy which will be crucial for our future prosperity. Sectors such as aviation, tourism, horticulture, retail, hospitality, entertainment and culture are all massively affected by the crisis and will need significant further support. As a region which depends on all of them, our own needs will be complex and will require Government funding.

It is vital to speak as one voice for the region on the points above and as a first step I have created a new blog – [Economy Watch](#) which will be updated each week to share business stories across all sectors and highlight particular challenges our region is facing. I will share this with you and your MPs, Leaders, economic development teams and across our social media channels.

We have already begun a strong regional dialogue on what it will take for our economy to adapt to help lead a national recovery from COVID. We are working with other LEPs in the South with Government to discuss how we can use our Local Industrial Strategy as a **Regional Recovery Plan**.

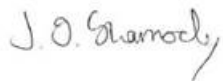
I believe that now is the time to deepen regional collaboration to prepare this, by developing a clear strategy for getting our region back to work and developing the right interventions to help this happen. I would be keen to engage further on how to do this and in the first instance I would like to:

- Offer LEP engagement in all of your resilience forums, so that we can help coordinate and collaborate on the recovery of the economy as a key work stream over the next 18 months.
- To deepen the collaboration between the LEP and your Economic Development teams even further, so that we are acting as one team and reinforcing our regional identity.
- Discuss how we can work together to get political consensus on the most significant impacts that COVID has had on the region, and on the things that we will need to do to re-establish ourselves as one of the major economic drivers of the UK economy.

If you would like to discuss anything, please do not hesitate to get in touch. I know there is a lot going on at the moment but I would be grateful if you could confirm you are happy with this approach and what economic recovery work you would like our input into.

I look forward to working with you through these challenging times.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Sharrock
Chief Executive