

Thames Valley Forum Statement on the Levelling Up White Paper

Thames Valley Forum welcomes the general principles of Levelling Up including the 12 'Missions' and the focus on ensuring all parts of our communities have the opportunity to benefit from a thriving economy.

The Thames Valley plays a crucial role in supporting the UK economy by creating jobs, growth and tax take across the UK. The Thames Valley economy achieves this due to its place-based centres of world class excellence in key growth sectors, which creates home grown successful companies and acts as a magnet for Inward Investment. Therefore, while enabling opportunities in other parts of the country, it is also vital to retain world leading beacons such as the Thames Valley for the UK to compete internationally.

The region's high economic performance indicators do not tell the full story. There are parts of the region, including both urban and rural, which have many challenges and have not felt the benefit of the region's economic growth in recent decades. The Thames Valley includes areas of deprivation in both urban and rural settings. Therefore, funding for Levelling Up projects should include supporting all regions.

Thames Valley Forum believes that bringing decision making to the region is welcome and should be encouraged. Creating effective partnerships across local areas and between public, private, and third sector to achieve impactful change and improvements on the ground is even more important. Areas such as transport, housing and education are key to the region achieving its ambitions.

We acknowledge that the political reality of the region's geography needs to be kept in mind, but strongly recommend:

- Thames Valley wide cooperation - all bodies in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire to cooperate formally and informally at the Thames Valley level on a regular basis
- Each County area to focus on achieving Level 2 or Level 3 Devolution
- The concept of the Arc to continue to be supported across the relevant geography
- Local Enterprise Partnerships should prioritise ambition and business engagement to rise to the role of being the '*Strategic Business Voice*'

25 March 2022