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Centre for the South: Stakeholder Mapping

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New Local

Contents

Table of Figures.....	2
Introduction.....	3
About the Centre for the South.....	3
About this project.....	4
About New Local.....	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Method.....	7
About the region.....	7
Strategic priorities over the next 5-15 years.....	10
Section 1: Developing institutional capital and regional identity.....	11
Losing out on national funding and lacking influence.....	12
Lack of pride in place.....	13
Lack of organisational direction.....	14
Thirst for knowledge.....	14
Opportunities for researchers: What is the region's local identity?.....	15
Section 2: Building social capital through better power structures.....	16
Challenges with existing power structures.....	17
Communities, power, and resilience.....	17
Opportunities for researchers: Where should the power lie?.....	19
Section 3: Addressing health inequalities to support human capital.....	20
Context of health inequalities.....	21
Problems in practice.....	21
Opportunities for researchers: How are health inequalities addressed?.....	22
Section 4: Developing skills and human capital.....	24
The regional context.....	24
What sectors need.....	25
Opportunities for researchers: What is the region's skills agenda?.....	26
Section 5: Fostering physical and financial capital through economy and place.....	29

Economic outlook.....	29
Potential for regional growth	30
Opportunities for researchers: What is the future economy and place?.....	31
Section 6: Improving physical infrastructure and capital	33
Infrastructure in the region	33
What is needed?	34
Opportunities for researchers.....	35
Conclusion and next steps.....	37

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Policy products.....	5
Figure 2: Research gaps.....	6
Figure 3: Interviews by sector	7
Figure 4: Broad regional focus.....	8
Figure 5: Map of deprivation.....	9
Figure 6: Schematic of priorities.....	10
Figure 7: Why identity matters	12
Figure 8: Hierarchy of approaches to community empowerment.....	18
Figure 9: Questions from stakeholders related to communities.....	19
Figure 10: Moving to preventative services.....	23
Figure 11: Skills' gaps	25
Figure 12: Skills research gaps and connections.....	27
Figure 13: Questions for the future economy and place	32
Figure 14: Priorities linked to building capital.....	37

Introduction

The University of Southampton has a vision: to become a truly civic university, working in partnership with local groups and authorities to champion the central South as a place and work together to overcome challenges.

The University has a rich heritage and connection with the city of Southampton, sharing its ambition as a cultural city and a gateway to the world. But this is bigger than Southampton. And Portsmouth, and Bournemouth. There are opportunities and challenges across the area which working together can unlock answers to.

The recent Civic Partnership Agreement, co-designed with local communities and authorities, partners, and alumni, has set out its four pillars: Place, People, Partnerships, and Impact to foster collaborations and a sense of belonging. The commitment to become a civic university will enable the university to become integrated within its local communities and drive the social, economic, and environmental benefits which are the most needed at the regional level. It will also create new opportunities for the student and academic community, to be involved in providing answers to some of the greatest regional challenges.

About the Centre for the South

As part of its Place pillar, the University of Southampton aims to establish a new Centre for the South to undertake strategic and agenda setting research and policy advice on key issues facing central southern England. The Centre will complement the University's existing and wide-ranging civic engagement, enterprise, and knowledge exchange and draw on research expertise from across the university to inform and coordinate responses to those issues.

The Centre's work will respond to strategic challenges across the region by providing valuable evidence to sectors and their leaders to advance regional aims. This is a unique opportunity to blend academic and/or technical research with practical outcomes, delivering real impact for the surrounding locations and develop experience for researchers.

The research projects homed by the institution will be drawn from a range of disciplines which celebrates interdisciplinarity. Broadly, projects will:

- be agenda setting looking five, ten or more years ahead.
- address regional issues of interest to more than one stakeholder.
- respond to public, private, or voluntary sectors, or a combination thereof.

This is a new academic institution which seeks to add value to the region through directing research activity towards core strategic questions.

About this project

To support the Centre's early development, framing and prioritisation, New Local was commissioned to undertake a stakeholder engagement project. This entailed conducting a series of interviews with key decision-makers, leaders and influential figures from the public, private and voluntary sectors to:

- identify a range of strategic issues from key stakeholders in the region.
- analyse the responses and identify where there are shared priorities which could frame the Centre's priorities for agenda-setting research.
- support stakeholders' awareness of the role, purpose, and value of a Centre for the South.

The research project was focused and time-limited, conducting 23 interviews with chief executives and regional directors across health, councils, VCSE, arts and culture, and business to draw out the social and economic issues that the region faces.

This report presents the findings to support the Centre's future mapping and strategic priority-setting and review of internal research capacity. It first sets out an overview of both the method and the region, identifying relevant factors which impact all stakeholders' decision-making, before expanding on the six core priorities identified by stakeholders.

About New Local

New Local is an independent think tank and network of councils, with a mission to transform public services and unlock community power. Community power is the idea that people should have more say over the places they live and the services they use. It recognises that people and communities have valuable insights into their own circumstances. In local areas, the public sector and other partners need to work with communities to find solutions to the big challenges and improve places and services. We believe a paradigm shift, underpinned by community power, is needed to create sustainable public services, better places to live, and enhanced wellbeing for all.

Executive Summary

New Local spoke to 23 senior decision-makers in the central South to understand the priorities, challenges and opportunities which exist in the region and where research could be usefully directed to support the region's advancement.

We found a strong desire for regional collaboration and identity, a willingness to work beyond sectoral boundaries, but a lack of understanding – and drivers – on how to go about it. Stakeholders were proud of the central South, pointing out the breath-taking natural environment, the rich cultural and heritage features, and the innovative and creative industries. Yet many were frustrated that the same pride did not manifest in regional aspiration among their communities. And while detail within topics was discussed – and are developed further throughout this report – this was the chief question for every senior leader: **how do we make the central South the best place to live and work now and for years to come?**

Broadly speaking, the asks on the research community were two-fold: to develop specific products or policies to support better collaboration and regional development and to evidence solutions to some of their most pressing questions. Figure 1 sets out products requested by stakeholders. These are comparatively self-contained, but tangible, outputs which stakeholders would use in their final form. These should not be considered exhaustive but do reveal a strong desire for research to support organisations in *how* to achieve their objectives.

Preliminary	Products	Evaluation	Design or technical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mapping of local representative bodies and quangos • establishment of a regional commission to develop products in collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a narrative and regional identity • strategic plans for: region, skills, transport • 5-year social value charter with citizens and business leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • of population nudges • of collaboration • of the core health inequalities in the region (and therefore resource allocation) • of investing in prevention (economic) • of community health initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a design of high streets • a low-space, low-cost design solutions for infrastructure • technical decarbonisation advice

Figure 1: Policy products

Figure 2 provides an overview of research asks made by stakeholders. These are practically focused – participants thought carefully about what research

endeavours would best contribute to help them achieve their aims – but involve more open questions than in Figure 1. As a result, there will be further questions of greater analytic potential which researchers could provide alternative framing.

Regional identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drivers and limiters of aspirations • Lessons from other regions, places and countries
Power and people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power structures and new paradigms • Community needs and assets • Relationship between deprivation and resilience
Health inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merit of addressing inequalities • Addressing health inequalities (policy levers, nudges)
Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention and attraction of graduates • Improvement of skills within local population • Skills and labour needs of the future
Economy and place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers and enablers to growth • Future of place – what works • International trade and marketing
Infrastructure (transport and housing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioural insights

Figure 2: Research gaps

The predominant gaps in stakeholders’ minds relate not to the what to do in the region – or even the why – but the “how”. As a result, researchers should be empowered to analyse these using a range of conceptual and methodological frameworks to develop creative and new approaches and solutions. Addressing these priorities therefore presents a significant opportunity for researchers to develop multi-disciplinary teams, align existing research questions to providing substantial practical application and impact, and seek funding through innovative partnerships.

Method

We conducted 23 interviews with Chief Executives, and Regional Directors of multinational organisations, across five sectors as identified below.

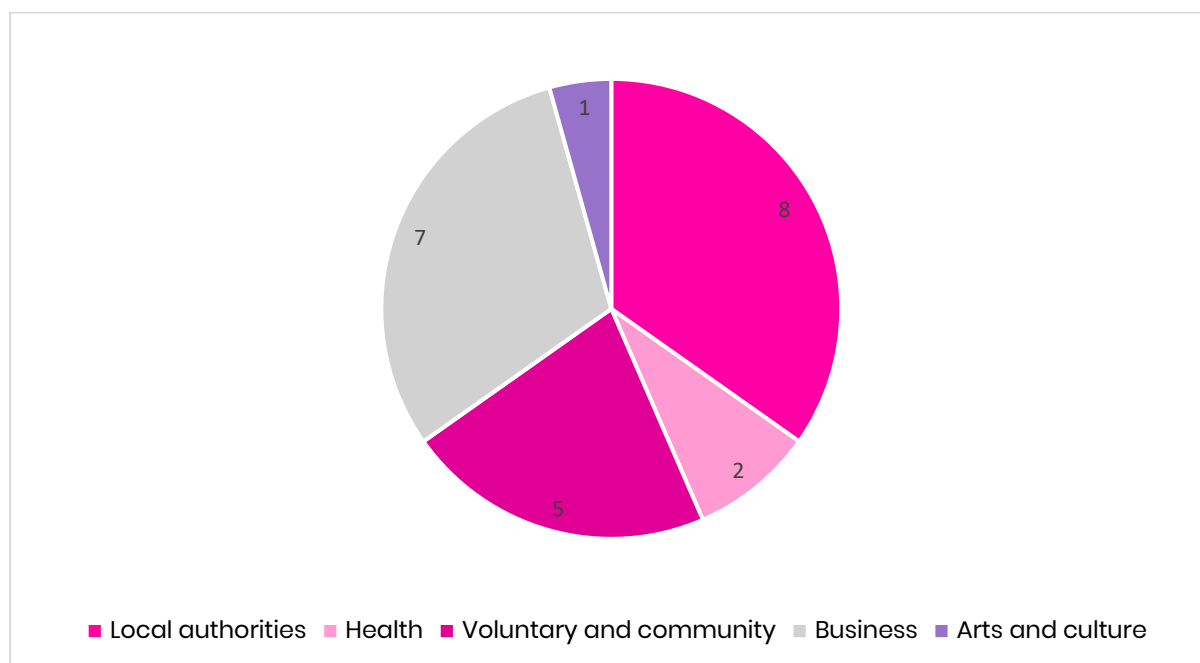


Figure 3: Interviews by sector

Interviews were conducted virtually and lasted around 30 minutes. Stakeholders were asked for their strategic challenges, priorities over the next 5, 10 and 15 years and thoughts on where the opportunities for greater regional alignment lay. They were also asked where they thought academic research could be directed.

The findings presented below are drawn from comments made by multiple stakeholders. Singular priorities, while important, are not identified. All comments in double quotation marks, in italic, are quotes taken from the interviews. To protect stakeholders' confidentiality and ensure that they felt confident in speaking freely, quotes are identified by public (councils and health), private (business) and third (VCSE and arts and culture) sectors only. Before setting out the priorities, the following section sets out how participants described and viewed the region; features which underpin and drive all core priorities.

About the region

Central Southern England covers a wide geography. It is a blend of urban, rural, and coastal communities, which has both strong and direct links to the capital while also homing a diverse collection of unique places. Often considered as Wessex or the Solent, the region has porous boundaries. For the purposes of this research, we

spoke to leaders from Test Valley to Havant and from the Isle of Wight to Basingstoke, as indicated in figure 4.



Figure 4: Broad regional focus

The region's geography presents particular challenges. While fortunate to have a large national park, miles of good quality beaches and sea, and landscape features such as chalk rivers, these geographical features constrain choices. Larger scale infrastructure is difficult to achieve; with housing, commercial and public projects constrained by land availability and planning processes.

Transport and digital connectivity is also impacted by the landscape of the region. With London accessible – albeit to more parts than others – there are strong commuter links which are not necessarily supported by the transport and connectivity infrastructure.

As a result, it is no coincidence that stakeholders felt that the region's primary economic sectors are specialist engineering and advanced manufacturing, often in aviation and maritime. Other key sectors were identified as financial and insurance sectors; retail, tourism and hospitality; and technology. A strong, independent, arts and culture sector was also noted for providing a wealth of creative projects and initiatives.

Like everywhere, the central South has seen increasing deprivation and impact of Covid-19 and the Cost of Living. Yet this reality does not meet the perception of the South as an essentially affluent area. As one participant commented: *“the issue for the South is there are pockets of deprivation within affluence”* (**third sector**) as reflected by the below map:

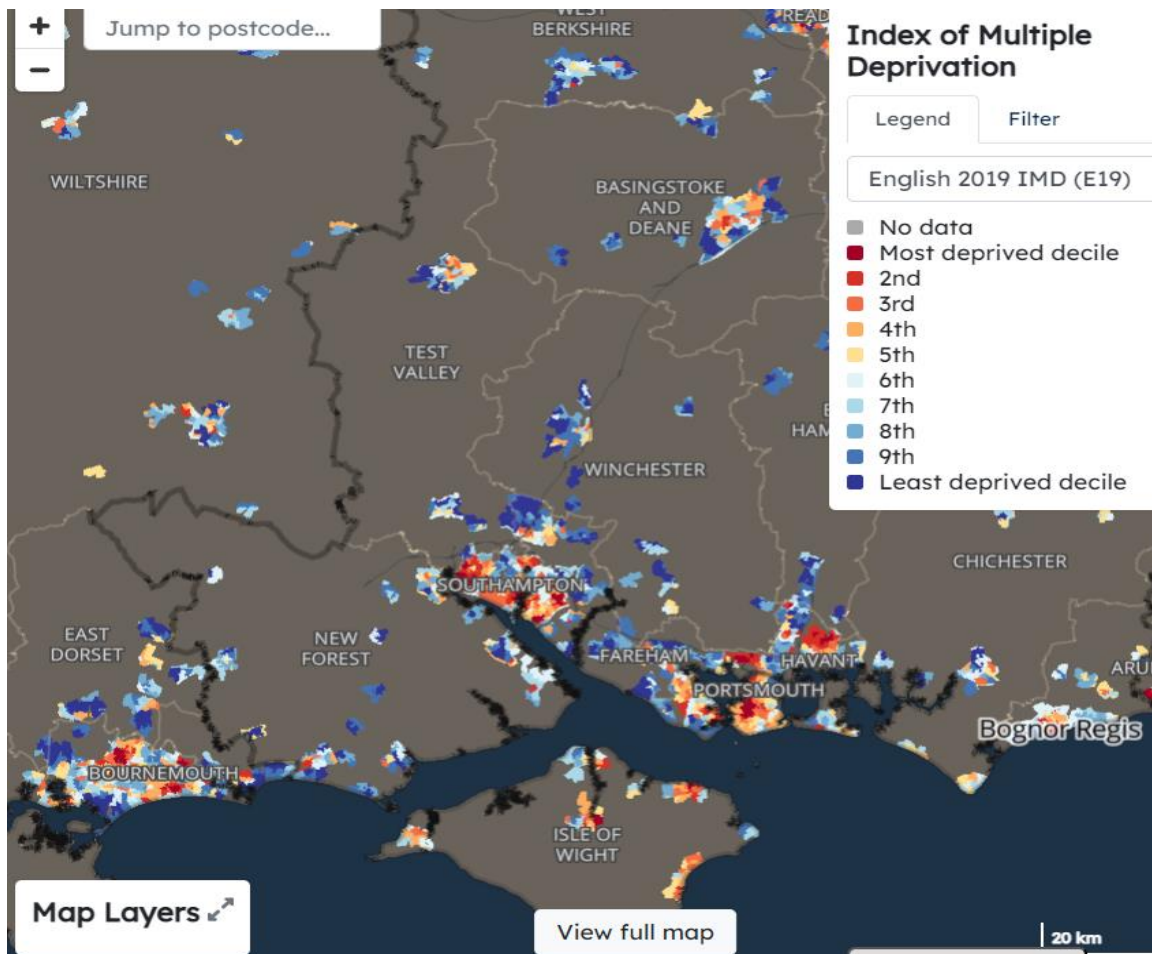


Figure 5: Map of deprivation.

Data: [Index of Multiple Deprivation \(IMD\) | CDRC Data](#)

Taken together, these unique features of the area create both challenges and opportunities for organisations in the region and frame all the participants' thinking. The remainder of this report sets out that thinking, setting out the strategic priorities of the participants grouped by theme but each overlapping with each other.

Strategic priorities over the next 5–15 years

“Either start with the low hanging fruit or infrastructure. We need to find out and understand and bridge those gaps, but recognise we are merging the ecosystem up. Make some things happen but shape for the future” (private sector).

When setting strategic priorities, stakeholders have a choice. They can prioritise either the most urgent issue or those which are foundational to achieving other aims. Often, they are trying to do both while leading their organisation through times of significant upheaval. Indeed, all sectors (albeit not all organisations) reported that their most pressing short-term concern was survival.

Sectoral and organisational contexts, and individual leadership approaches, impact choices over sequencing and therefore how priorities are viewed. Themes and issues are also overlapping, interconnected and span multiple timeframes. As demonstrated in figure 6, while some topics are shorter-term (identity building) or longer-term (transport), these six themes are at the forefront of stakeholders’ minds because they all require decisions to be taken now. Indeed, that appears to be how stakeholders regarded issue as a core priority.

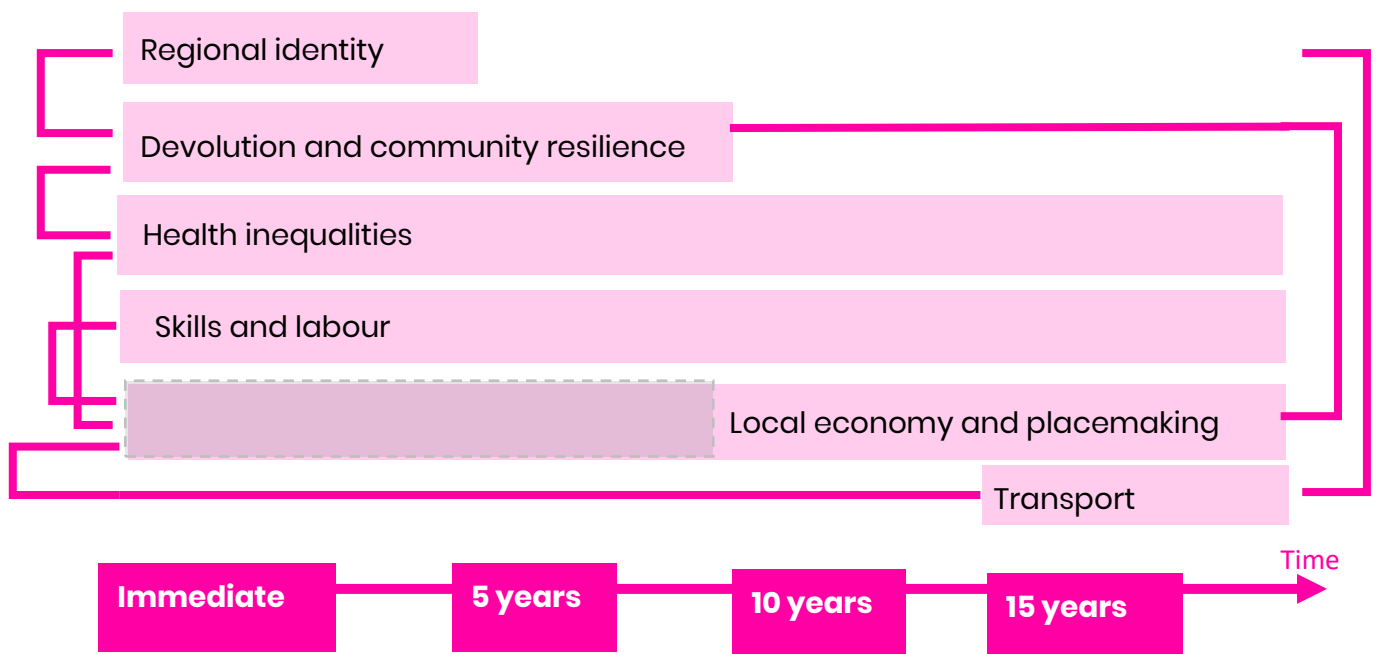


Figure 6: Schematic of priorities

As a result, the following sections should be read as co-dependent with each being impacted by, and impacting other, priorities. For the research community, some of the most interesting questions will emerge from a cross thematic analysis of the findings and an opportunity to engage in cross-disciplinary work.

Section 1: Developing institutional capital and regional identity

“Short term priority as a region? Setting some of the key priorities which are shared priorities over the next 5 years. There’s not just one player – how do we identify common goals and how to work together to achieve them?” (private sector)

The region lacks a strong identity. Comprised of multiple villages, towns and cities – and spanning several counties – even this research struggled to know where to draw the boundaries of “the central South”. The incoherence results in a dispersed policy and funding network that challenges strategic decision-making, which then undermines unlocking the region’s potential.

Participants from all sectors therefore considered developing a regional identity to be an immediate priority to improve the region’s institutional capital. Doing so was seen as both the ‘low hanging fruit’ – easier (cheaper) than other priorities – and the foundational principle from which the region can develop its human, social, financial and physical capital from.

Summary of research questions

The majority of research requested was the development of policy products: a regional identity, strategic plans. Yet there are broader research asks which would inform these products’ developments.

Research asks

- Drivers and limiters of aspirations – why do aspirations drop and how can they be raised? How do they change through young people’s lives? How is aspiration linked to deprivation? What is the impact on coastal, rural and urban communities?
- Geographic or historical comparisons – what united the region and created its growth? What opportunities exist which can be reinvigorated now? What have other places done?
- Regional prosperity – would a regional approach to consolidate and harmonise objectives lead to better regional prosperity?

Policy asks

- Mapping exercise of local representative bodies and quangos.
- Establishment of a commission to establish relationships and build consensus, using Freeports as a potential model
- A regional identity – both narrative and objectives – and an understanding of the individual organisations’ roles and responsibilities within it.
- A strategic plan for the region.

Identity may feel a surprisingly intangible request from chief executives. Yet many of the region's problems were ascribed to this failure to develop, as set out in figure 7 and expanded on in the remainder of this section.

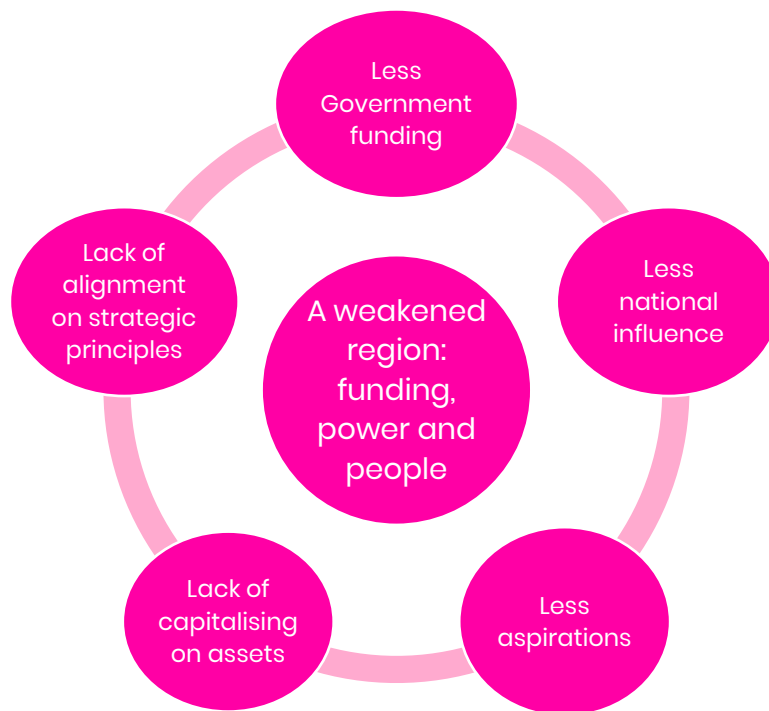


Figure 7: Why identity matters

Losing out on national funding and lacking influence

The region's lack of identity impacted the ability to influence national policy and acquire funding. It was striking that stakeholders from all sectors commented on the central South's perception of affluence hiding pockets of deprivation, which perpetuated the view that *"the South has resource, the North doesn't"* (**public sector**). As a result, stakeholders felt that the central South was likely to lose out to Northern regions in large scale competitive funds, reducing the potential for bringing in further investment. That fear is not limited to concerns over managing current issues but extends to a longer-term state of affairs; *"there is a pervasive worry we're going to be overlooked by Government for generations..."* (**public sector**). As a result, stakeholders felt a more permanent solution to the lack of Government funding was required for the region.

In addition, having multiple local bodies in a regional area with porous boundaries undermined third sector funding. Applications and tenders often require a large reach but *"boundaries for funding don't always align to actual boundaries"* (**third sector**). This meant they were losing out to national charities and programmes, and local organisations were threatened with survival.

Some approached the challenge in an asset-based way; recognising that as funding is unlikely to be forthcoming, and that the central South – in some areas – does have resource, they sought to capitalise on their assets. As one participant put it, *‘how do I get that awareness of all of the assets we’ve got, so I can create a modern town/city?’* (**public sector**). That awareness was fundamentally linked to a sense of aspiration – discussed further in the following section.

Interestingly, no stakeholders identified current large scale economic projects – e.g. regeneration projects, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the establishment of Freeports – as key priorities. This is probably because, having reached delivery, they are already seen as part of the future policy landscape; as one participant drily noted, *“we just need to not stuff it up”* (**private sector**). Instead, the desire was situated in considering the future of the region, and the need to get the principles in place now which will impact the central South in 10, 20, 30 years.

Lack of pride in place

Identity went deeper than losing out on funding however, into a low sense of pride in place. Multiple stakeholders commented on the need to reinvigorate the region’s aspirations and make better use and promotion of the assets it has, e.g. *“in the short term, we need to raise aspirations in place”* (**public sector**). There was a sense that people were not proud of where they lived and that undermined their resilience and potential prosperity. Implicitly, therefore, concerns over aspirations were linked predominantly to poverty and deprivation. However, while stakeholders wanted to galvanise a sense of civic pride and confidence, they were unclear on the drivers or cause of the aspirational decline.

Of particular concern though was young people’s aspirations, which was linked to concerns of the retention of young people to the area – discussed further in section 4. While one participant felt *“there’s no lack of aspiration”*, she did wonder why and how aspirations were defeated:

“I would love to know what children in infant school think it means to be an adult in their city. And then ask 14 to 15-year-olds what it means to be an adult in their city. And then people in their late 20s. Children will have ideas but will be slowly dampened down.... What is it that people which are leading communities are doing, or need to be doing?” (**third sector**)

In addition, concerns were expressed over how coastal communities related to the region, with particular issues over deprivation and an increase of second home ownership diluting their sense of connectedness. Such communities *“have more in common with each other than the south of region to north Hampshire”* (**third**

sector), which further complicated a sense of regional identity and means solutions to issues in one area will not necessarily fit another.

Lack of organisational direction

All sectors referenced the lack of a coherent regional strategic vision as impacting their ability to set organisational direction. While councils pointed to their own corporate plans which set medium-term priorities, they noted a lack of cohesiveness on the regional aims. All sectors referenced that the multiple umbrella organisations, quangos and representative bodies appear inconsistent, with one asking “*what does that actually mean for the city?*” (**third sector**).

Ensuring there was a singular vision would bring unity to the region and support capacity and capability building. Stakeholders noted the following benefits: building relationships across seemingly disparate organisations; developing consensus around the shared priorities and strengthening resolve; sharing learning across organisations to deliver objectives; and having external branding to attract inward investment.

Perhaps surprisingly, participants were not particularly concerned as to what the plan was. As one participant said “*we need to cut through and just focus on one, or three, things*” (**third sector**). The request was for alignment and a coalition.

Thirst for knowledge

Linked to the preceding observations, stakeholders were positive about the region’s potential. There was desire for more intellectual and financial investment in the right places, which could be unlocked through stronger links to the region’s educational establishments. Or as one participant put it: “*knowledge is there, ability is there, money is there, but someone needs to be spending it the right way*” (**third sector**).

Stakeholders saw the potential for a “*regional research network*” (**public sector**) as a real positive while another added “*I would like to see more social awareness, using those academically bright people for the good for society*” (**third sector**). One private sector participant requested that any academic work for the region should be packaged as “the Central South Centre” to build on recent conversations which agreed this framing, indicating the challenges already experienced in bringing a sense of unified identity to the region. Taking the central South as the key element, and to signal that the academic work is grounded in the priorities of the region, the centre could be named the “Institute of the Central South”.

While there was a sense from the private and third sectors that there could be many benefits to them from learning from research, there was a strong message

that academic work remained practical and avoided “*the spiral of academic thinking*” (**public sector**), for instance:

“Look at what’s been done to inform the next. Please do not reinvent a wheel and do research which is already done.” (**third sector**)

For most participants who commented, it was how the research was being conducted as opposed to what was being researched, which provides a significant opportunity to adopt a range of innovative methodological approaches. Although a caveat to this conclusion is that those chief executives willing to participate in a research project are undoubtedly more minded to research activity.

Opportunities for researchers: What is the region’s local identity?

The language stakeholders used was telling. They frequently defined the region by what it’s not – it’s not “the North” with it’s economic investment; it’s not “Greater Manchester” in terms of devolution; it’s not one place, nor is it one community, with urban, coastal and rural communities differing to each other:

“We are not the Home Counties, not provincial. Development hops over the green belt and then lands in Hampshire. And we have the perennial difficulty with the issue of the Solent versus Hampshire...” (**public sector**)

What did unite stakeholders though was the natural and built environment: “*important towns, two national parks, 290 miles coastline, valuable green space, important wetlands*” (**public sector**). Most converged around the water and the coastline as a particular asset. As one commented, there are miles of “*world class... fantastic golden beaches – how come no-one knows?*” (**public sector**), while another asked:

“How can the water be used in a way which is transformational for our communities? Currently it’s seen as a barrier. How could we make that an asset?” (**private sector**),

Publicising the region, through a strong branding, was viewed as a priority to both attract investment and re-establish civic pride. It was also viewed as necessary in order to support policy influence.

Although a note of caution. While alignment and identity development was considered vital, there was a warning not to remove the unique character of local places: “*if you regionalise then you dumb up and see the economy in a regional light*” (**public sector**). Alignment should not equate to standardisation but provide a platform for decision-makers to collaborate and develop their own objectives. Indeed, the diversity itself is a hallmark of the region’s identity.

Section 2: Building social capital through better power structures

“Giving away power is difficult” (**public sector**).

The region is at a turning point; conversations around devolution rumble on while new structures, such as Freeports, have gathered pace. Decisions over the future direction are needed to provide clarity for organisational decision-making, but they go further than providing strategic boundaries to operate within. There is a sense that the underlying power structures equally need to shift.

In addition, concerns over communities’ resilience and prosperity as the region emerges from COVID-19 bring to life the need for effective institutional structures and public services. With less funding and investment available, all sectors are required to do more than less – reducing both the cost and improving the value.

As a result, a new model for power is needed; one which incorporates devolved power and resources from central Government while working with communities to better understand their wants, needs and assets. Evidence of what works – including comparative work – can significantly support this aim.

Summary of research questions

Research questions under this broad theme principally asked “how”: how can devolution be settled? How can services meet community needs? How can communities become more resilient? But these questions reveal deeply analytic problems which will be of significant interest to the academic community: the relationship between resilience and deprivation; the tension of vertical and horizontal power structures; the method of breaking cycles of dependency on the system. For example:

State-based power: What is happening in places in terms of power distribution? Where are there are new opportunities for more power to influence? How can a devo deal work in the central South?

Community-based power: What do people need and want? What constitutes a good, socially active community? How do communities gain resilience and what are the benefits in doing so?

A significant, multi-disciplinary research project could be developed, bringing together subject expertise in new and innovative ways: political scientists working alongside health and economic specialists; community researchers working with academic researchers to develop cogent answers to the broader theoretical question of **where should the power lie?**

Challenges with existing power structures

Participants from all sectors were frustrated by the issue of devolution; as one participant put it: “*we need to sort the devolution issue out once and for all...*” (**public sector**). Every sector raised the issue of devolution and expressed concern that the conversation was still ongoing, which was holding the region back: “*do it or don’t do it, but it causes fractures in policy design.*” (**private sector**).

The challenge for conversations was ascribed to the political make-up of the region, with unitary and district councils (both rural and urban) part of the governance landscape. Perhaps surprisingly due to this balance, participants were relatively ideologically agnostic about the establishment of a mayor, adopting a pragmatic approach as the method to unlock powers and resources; although they did wonder how a mayor could represent such a diversity of places. Participants were however attracted to a devo deal for its convening power:

“a devo deal can bring together a disparate political landscape. We need a rallying call; a common sense of purpose to bring together different populations” (**public sector**).

They also bring economic benefits, including city investment to address key infrastructure challenges, and freedom and flexibilities to raise local tax, such as a tourist tax. A few participants – from different sectors – asked what lessons could be drawn from Greater Manchester as an example of successful devolution.

A central theme running out of conversations on devo deals, was the need to establish effective partnership working for both people and businesses; there are “*development opportunities in industry if we work together – to draw in money to the region and work collaboratively to distribute to communities*” (**third sector**). Despite the reoccurring theme that collaboration was vital, there was a connected concern that “*when times get tough, and it is really tough, people either collaborate or retrench*” (**public sector**). As a result, they requested an evidence base on the benefits of continuing collaboration on wicked problems during times of crisis.

Communities, power, and resilience

The wider conversation on power structures related directly to the need to build both resilience and prosperity within communities, a particular priority of the public sector. For some, this was about adopting an organisational outlook which “*shifted to community experience over community service*” (**public sector**) and using an asset-based community development model to solve local issues and capitalise on the local desire “*to get things done*” (**public sector**). For others, developing a strong understanding of what communities need and have access to, so that

services could be designed around that need, was important. More broadly, all sectors commented on the importance of understanding people through behavioural change: cutting across themes from transport, to health, to climate change: “to understand how to engage, how to communicate; not just how to influence and drive behaviour change in of itself” (**public sector**).

These three approaches represent a subtle but important shift in public decision-making. Stakeholders’ starting point was not the delivery of services, but the people using them. While the approaches differed based on the amount of power retained by the public sector, as represented in figure 8, they each reveal that decision-makers are increasingly concerned with how people interact with services.



Figure 8: Hierarchy of approaches to community empowerment

The reasons for this shift are perhaps attributable to the tightening of the public purse. There is less money and so it needs to be spent in the most effective way – to be both used, and needed, by the public. In doing so, whether overtly or not, stakeholders created an opportunity for a new relationship between citizens and state, and a new theoretical framework for the delivery of public services beyond the public management paradigm, as reflected in the following extract:

“We tend to gold plate services, but not enough of it is evidence-based. How do we connect with our communities about what’s important to them and explain we can’t do this because –? We don’t have that honest conversation enough. What we’ve done as a sector, we’ve taken people’s ability to help themselves. Give that power to our communities to build their own destiny. What does that look like? How do you build capacity in the community, especially deprived communities, with people when all they know is poverty? Break that cycle of dependency on the system?” (**public sector**).

These questions provide an interesting framework for regional researchers to blend expertise and develop novel changes to regional power dynamics.

Opportunities for researchers: Where should the power lie?

When stakeholders referenced concerns over devo deals and queries over community resilience, in many ways they were questioning the existing power structures with both the State and communities. While the open-ended conversation around devolution reveals frustration at failing to make progress, the fact the question has not been settled indicates a lack of agreement or knowledge on the best direction. This provides fertile research ground, including comparative work, to explore the impact of more power in the region. Indeed, such is the issue's centrality, there may be a case for a standing programme of work for the Centre incorporating governance, devolution and fiscal policy.

Similarly, when stakeholders spoke of resilience, they linked it to a range of concerns: resilience of communities, of the economy, of the VCSE sector etc. They also implicitly linked it to addressing poverty and deprivation, associating those with less money as being less resilient. As this research was conducted following COVID-19, it is likely that the recent years have made this issue more of a strategic priority. Yet the concerns over power structures and resilience also reflect the changing national governance picture, including Brexit and the narrative of "taking back control". Compounded by the wider national economic outlook declining and pressures on the finances of public services rising, there is a real need for decision-makers to adopt an alternative model, particularly in the sectors reliant on public money. And that need has inspired multiple questions, as set out in figure 9:



Figure 9: Questions from stakeholders related to communities

This is thus an opportune moment for a range of theoretical and empirical approaches to contribute to a fundamental change in direction for the region.

Section 3: Addressing health inequalities to support human capital

“Health inequalities worry me – and really trying to understand what the best levers would be to address health inequalities. Not a medical response – a social, public health response. How do we really resolve those health inequalities?”
(public sector).

Health inequalities in the region vary, with health status, access and experience of care, and wider determinants of health differing across prosperous and deprived places. Yet addressing them is a core priority across all sectors. As expected, while the public and third sector were primarily concerned with the health of the region and ability for the system to meet those needs, the private sector noted the importance of having a healthy – and economically active – population to contribute to the region’s prosperity. Overcoming health inequalities, while not straightforward, is a vital part of supporting human capital.

Summary of research questions

The need to reduce health inequalities within the population can be categorised into two broad questions – the justification and the practice.

- What is the evidence to support the case for reducing health inequalities? Why does health matter?
- What are the best levers to address health inequalities? What makes a difference and ‘what works’ around deprivation and inequality?

Stakeholders requested multi-disciplinary research to inform their decision-making, with the following regarded as particularly helpful:

- Examples of what population nudges have proven effective.
- Evidence of the optimum configuration for health and social care in light of rising demand and reducing resources.
- Economic evidence for investing in prevention.
- Evidence of place design which encourages health and wellbeing.
- Development of a five-year social value charter which citizens and business leaders sign up to.
- Discussion of the ethical frameworks behind making difficult decisions as a society and balancing finite resources
- Discussion and awareness of the role of citizens in supporting their own health.

Ultimately, the public and third sectors want to know: *“where should we be spending our money and resources?”*

Context of health inequalities

Nationally the demand on, and cost of, health and adult social care is rising. However the region's aging population means that the healthcare system is "hit on both sides. Demand goes up with increasing ageing and also people's health is getting worse" (**public sector**). In addition, there is "huge variation in health across the region" (**third sector**), which is often hidden by its perceived affluence. While "creativity and collaboration" (**third sector**) has ensured that health and social care has so far weathered the storm, participants commented that it was one of their biggest concerns and a core driver of public service financial pressures.

All the concerns relating to this topic related to systematic questions, touching on the determinants of ill-health but not expressing views on the public health issues facing the region. This is likely to be due to the seniority of the participants interviewed who hold the institutional and contextual view. Further exploration of the key health inequalities in the region would be valuable, not least to help answer what are the levers that need to be pulled.

Problems in practice

In the short term, and overlapping with the section on skills, the most pressing issue within the health sector was the workforce:

*"There are physically not enough people – unless something happens. Could be a change in government policy to afford people, but 500,000 people have left the workforce" (**third sector**).*

Turnover and low retention was attributed to high stress, low wages, mix of cases, high levels of deprivation, safeguarding issues, and high case load. Organisations which support acute healthcare also reported a downturn in volunteering, but an increase in demand on their services. As one participant said:

*"There's an expectation from the health sector that there's a magic source of people. VCS stepped forward for Covid, especially community transport and getting people to appointments [but] the county council pulled the funding because it's a 'Health' cost but 'Health' haven't picked up the cost" (**third sector**).*

The voluntary sector has also undergone changes in line with changing labour patterns and expectations. The realities of volunteering which often set shift patterns have made it hard for organisations to recruit, particularly young people who want to work (and volunteer) more flexibly.

Local organisations are also under financial stress as they do not have access to the same funding as national organisations, not least because contracting opportunities often require a national outlook, even where the programmes are to be delivered locally. As a result, there are “fewer pots of money, or they’re there, but costs are just prohibitive” (**third sector**), making the short-term priority for many being one simply of survival.

In the medium-term, it was hoped that a new hospital would be built alongside increases in diagnostic capacity. However current resource pressures threaten capital investment, and the failure to invest in buildings, equipment and digital technologies will “have a knock-on effect in terms of sustainability” (**public sector**).

In the longer-term, the VCSE and public sectors both noted that moving to a preventative model of healthcare over acute provision was the best way to meet increasing demand. To achieve this, the aspiration was that health and wellbeing was seen as intrinsic to all other policies; part of wider place-making design and community resilience, with more responsible and resilient citizens and business leaders, and using “health and wellbeing and health inequalities as a measure of how we are doing as a society, rather than measuring in GDP” (**public sector**).

Thinking about health outcomes holistically, in line with economic opportunities, was seen as offering potential solutions but limited detail was discussed. For instance, a council wondered whether community health workers, employed in deprived estates, could have more impact as they were connected to local employment. Evaluative evidence on this type of intervention would be informative.

Opportunities for researchers: How are health inequalities addressed?

The health and VCSE sectors were concerned with the fundamental existence of their sectors. Demand for their services will only rise, which requires innovative, and immediate, action to address concerns. While there are elements of improving skills to address these problems, stakeholders were unconvinced that there would ever be enough workforce to meet the increasing demand. Local authorities were particularly concerned about the rising costs of demand, with one council highlighting it was their biggest expenditure. Prevention was seen as the most effective solution but there was little knowledge – including within the health sector – of what steps were needed to achieve this. As depicted in figure 9; there are multiple layers which contribute to the ambition which require further understanding.

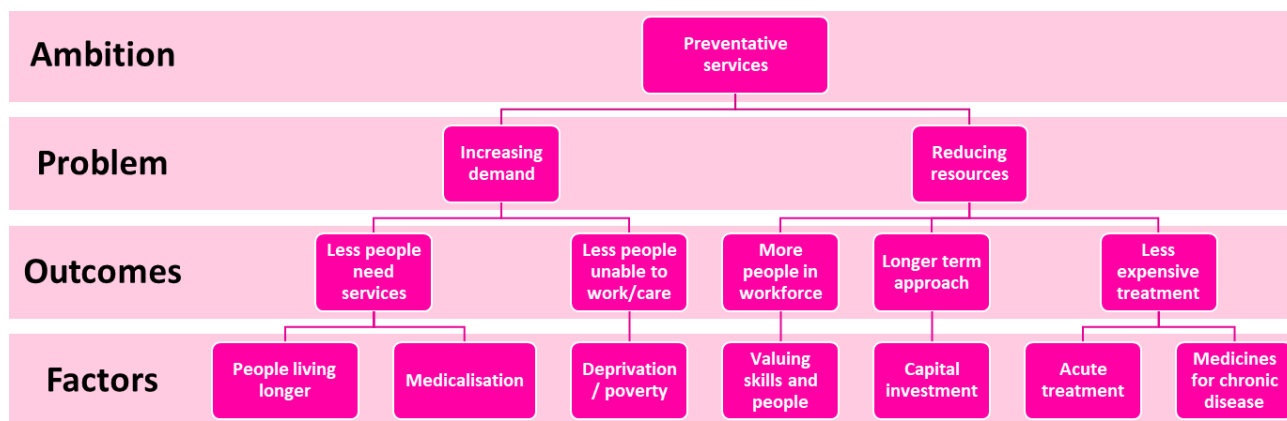


Figure 10: Moving to preventative services

Multiple stakeholders saw potential in Integrated Care Systems, termed by a council participant as “a massive super tanker”, but they cautioned that “moving resources from frontline to preventative is going to take time” (**public sector**). There were also questions over the organisational capabilities of working together. As one health participant observed:

“they all like each other and have good relationships but don’t understand enough about each other’s agendas. There remains confusion about roles and responsibilities” (**public sector**).

As a result, systems thinking applied to the health arena could provide intellectual capacity to address some of the practical issues stakeholders are facing.

An under-developed idea, but one which emerged through interviews with both healthcare professionals and councils, was the relationship that citizens have with their own health beyond system-led prevention; and the role that industry could play: “things are going to get harder. To protect the NHS and social care we need to be far more responsible citizens and business leaders” (**public sector**). This could draw on behavioural insights, community-led research, alongside philosophical and theoretical work. What is particularly interesting is how the participants spoke about the health system as something itself which needs to be protected. Language used spoke of reducing demand on “its” services, moving people “out” of frontline services. The system was the central component; not how it operated for the benefit of public health and communities. A radical research project might turn this around and ask, what does a healthcare system look like for it to meet the needs and desires of regional people?

Section 4: Developing skills and human capital

“The big challenge, as I see it, is the labour market to be honest. 1.5 million vacancies but low unemployment – really really low... This is what we’re hearing from SMEs, big businesses. Same challenge. Low unemployment and loads of jobs out there” (public sector).

Every sector identified skills and labour shortage as a key challenge for the region, both now and in the future. Linked to the sections either side of this topic, many of the stakeholders’ concerns reflected national trends – changes to working patterns, labour shortages in various sectors, and a transient local population. The core question for regional researchers centres on understanding the local need, and potential, for increased skills among the areas’ population.

Summary of research questions

The primary goal for all sectors was to employ more local people in their organisations. This manifested in two broad questions:

- How can we improve skills in the local population?
- How can we retain skilled people as part of the local population?

Within that, contextual questions followed:

- What are the skills needed by local employers now and in the future?
- How do the national changes to work impact the region?

The regional context

The world of work has changed. Expediated by COVID-19, flexible working and portfolio careers are becoming increasingly the norm while jobs for life – a mainstay of the region’s traditional engineering roles – are declining. In many of the region’s industries, apprentices and graduates are not applying for the positions they once were. Likewise, professionals can work in London for a higher salary without having to relocate.

The labour shortage is compounded in the region due to its older, and therefore non-working, population; relatively higher house prices compared to wages; and geographical features which restrict potential population size. Together, this means that region needs a highly economically active population to support the local economy and quality of life.

The challenge, as identified by all sectors, was that this regional need does not necessarily *“align with the views of leafy Hampshire”* (public sector). Affluence hides significant pockets of low productivity and high deprivation in areas. As a result, as

noted in section 1 large Government grants are not readily available. This means that the problem is one for the region to address; one that all sectors felt was hampered by a lack of ownership and cohesion around the issue.

What sectors need

All sectors called for better alignment between local educational suppliers and organisations: “*education and industry working hand in glove*” (**private sector**). Specifically, local schools and colleges should focus on developing the skills and competencies that employers in the region need:

“I think we could do more. I don’t see the big connections between the big sectors and their training needs and are the universities doing enough to support? And what are the schools doing to support them?” (**public sector**).

This framing puts education at the root of the supply problem; linking demand failures with a lack of alignment to training needs. In addition, the private and public sector felt there was untapped potential through creating a cluster of technologies or industries, around games, aerospace, defence, clean engineering, biotechnology and maritime. Using already established businesses, but establishing collaboration, could attract skilled people whilst reinforcing a sense of regional identity.

The skills, industry, and professional gaps of stakeholders are contained in figure 11. While the lack of STEM and digital skills is of national concern, these gaps are more acutely felt in the region’s primary industries and the business landscape comprised of a high proportion of SMEs. The need for professional skills equally highlights the impact of the region’s proximity to London.

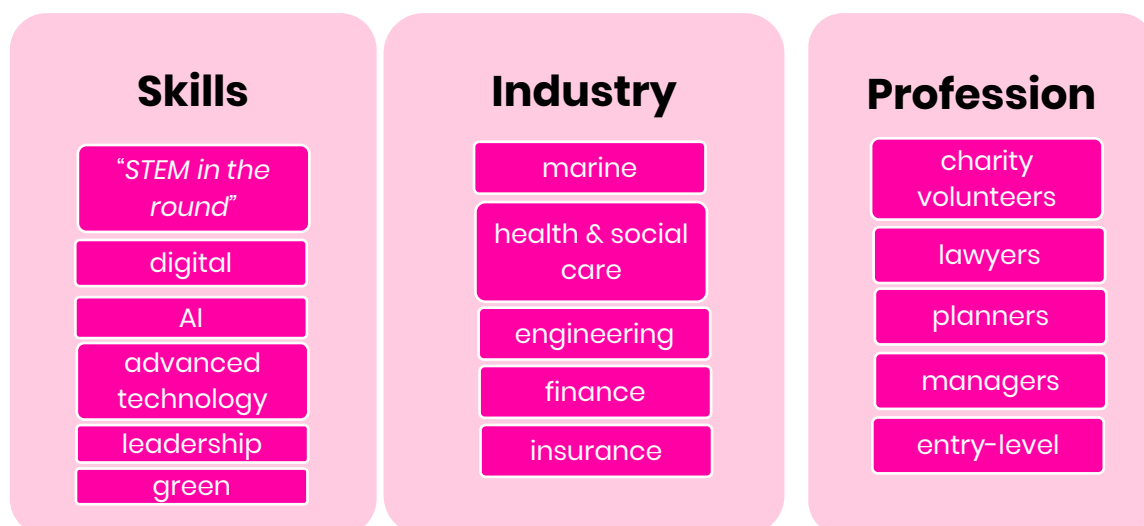


Figure 11: Skills’ gaps

For the health and VCSE sectors, the labour shortage was an urgent issue where lack of staff was threatening organisational survival:

“There is a lack of oxygen for the sector to develop, grow, train people – everyone’s just holding on. If you’re not over-working you’re not doing it properly.... There aren’t enough people to do the jobs” (third sector).

They felt that the educational system actively undermined careers and more should be done to encourage and promote work in their areas: *“we need to sort out valuing the workforce; stop social care in colleges being seen as working in a care home; see care as a career path” (third sector).* The relationship between social care, health and other voluntary sector services and mainstream education could therefore be examined to explore potential innovation within educational frameworks.

The private sector had a slightly different outlook. While fundamental – after all *“business is skills. Trade is skills. We can’t all do everything; trade is the exchange of skills” (private sector),* they viewed labour shortages as more typical: *“we’re short of staff, but we’ve always been short of staff” (private sector).* Their solution was a *“conveyor belt” (private sector)* of skills being developed from early education through to employment. This may fail to capture the wider changes to working patterns but highlights the need for grounding in local context.

Local authorities held a twin-view: broader concerns that their residents had access to employment and issues with their own recruitment. Within councils, roles which were previously routine either to fill with graduates, such as offering advice to residents on climate change, or through semi-skilled labour, such as grounds people, were increasingly hard to recruit for. There were *“constant struggles to get people working outside”* and challenges with recruiting *“specialist, non-specialist and professional” (public sector).* As one said – *“I attended a breakfast with business leaders to discuss skills, and then no-one could get a taxi!” (public sector).* Understanding why this is will be fundamental to future work on progressing the wider economic ambitions of the region.

While “labour shortage” and “skills deficit/gap” were used interchangeably by participants, they are different problems. A labour shortage is being felt nationally, which limits the potential of local action to an extent. The skills deficit however speaks to a failure to align the skills in the region with those needed by the region. Research is needed to further understand both the uniqueness of a regional labour shortage and skills deficit, and how to mitigate or reflect the wider changes to work.

Opportunities for researchers: What is the region’s skills agenda?

The primary request from the private and public sectors was for cohesion across the region. They felt that that the region is *“crying out for a strategic agenda”* and

that a “*proper strategy on skills*” should be developed through qualitative interviews, with the “*skills agenda being baked into our DNA*” (**private sector**). This reflects the view that while skills are of standalone importance, there is a lack of regional unity on what the local economy needs.

Developing a strategic agenda for skills requires an understanding of how the system currently works. The relationships between education, industry, health and the VCSE sector are vital to create the conditions needed for supporting local people into work and roles and retaining skilled graduates, as depicted by Figure 12.

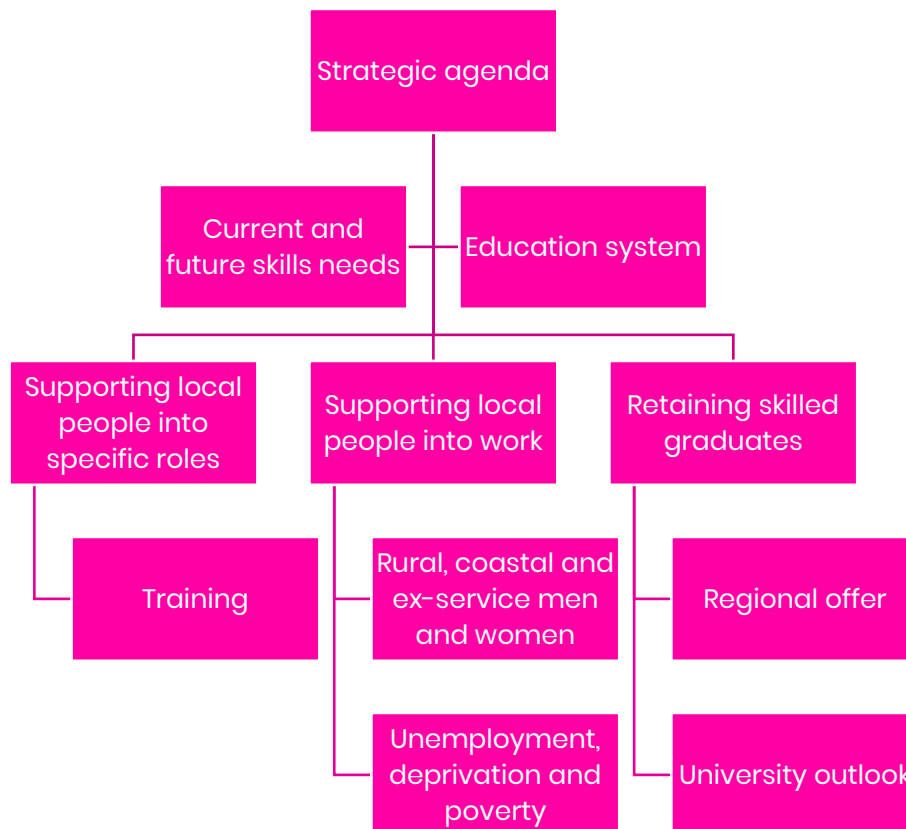


Figure 12: Skills research gaps and connections

There was also a sense from participants – discussed further in the next section – that the region is at a crossroads. Moving beyond traditional employment to new industries – drawing on creative, innovative, and hi-tech advancements – to offer new opportunities for residents. Yet there remains significant deprivation in some areas, with third generation families dependent on the benefits system. Work, and the skills needed by employers, was therefore more fundamental than simply upskilling the workforce; it cuts across identity, belonging, aspiration, and health inequalities. Indeed, as a participant in the health sector commented “*we spend a lot of time chasing skills, but we need the fundamentals in place first*” (**public sector**). Quite what those fundamentals should be needs further exploration as a precursor to any strategic agenda.

One interesting omission from the participants was the absence of strengths-based skills development. All sectors, bar the exception of a third sector participant, spoke of the need to align the education system and skills development with the needs of the employer. An underexplored framing may be an assessment of the skills and strengths of the existing population and asking what industries and organisations need to be attracted to the area?

Section 5: Fostering physical and financial capital through economy and place

“How do we make this an attractive place to live and work?” (**public sector**).

Economic growth and collective ambition around place were reoccurring questions. Predominantly a medium-term priority, stakeholders felt that decisions needed to be made now to enable and support future growth. Linked to this report’s first section, there was a desire to foster a *“collective ambition around a strong economy both now and in 20, 30, 40 years”* (**public sector**), by working together to develop a shared story to attract inward investment.

Summary of research questions

Broadly speaking, stakeholders were interested in evidence to support a successful future vision of the local economy. This could provide projects cutting across multiple disciplines, including economics, urban design and geography, public policy, international trade, and behavioural science to address:

- What does the future of the regional economy and place (communities, businesses, high streets, and towns) look like? How do we get there, and how do we know when we have?
- What is unique and marketable about the region and what are the barriers to driving forward growth?
- What can be learned from other places?

While the drive for data and evidence to underpin policy was strongest in this topic; it was also the area where stakeholders asked the broadest questions. As a result, while growth and a strong sense of place is desired, there remains significant scope for researchers to set the agenda.

Economic outlook

The local economy is comparatively strong, with big employers and proximity to London. Yet with some places seeing house prices at 14 times the national average, there is a need for sustainable growth. Indeed, regional economic development was a key driver for all sectors, seen as pivotal to addressing everything from labour shortages to health inequalities: *“if we could get a sustainable economic growth then that will help us with other challenges”* (**public sector**).

The locale’s unique nature provided specific challenges to both economic expansion and regeneration. Participants indicated that the planning system, transport issues, and labour challenges hindered development, with an oft-cited concern being the lack of available space to build offices, homes and expand

existing businesses onto. Projects can also take longer to complete – either because heritage-sensitive places take time to regenerate, or because it is not considered an urgent or pressing priority to others. The lack of space will limit the usual model of growth but does provide an opportunity for innovative solutions – from urban design to organisational management shifts.

All sectors singled out the irreversible decline of the high street as a particular area of interest:

“The high street won’t go back to being what it was. What do our city centres look like as places for people to be able to come together, not just shopping but other things?” (third sector)

Town centre regeneration poses new challenges, with participants keen to adopt a new format for their centres, no longer anchored around retail stores. Elements of new town centres contained mixed use, chain and independent shops, open spaces, leisure and culture, community spaces and housing. Concerns were raised though regarding funding and land ownership, particularly when not owned by the local authority. There was a sense that the levers were there – through business rates and controls on private equity companies – but they should be used to develop centres of towns and cities that people want to visit.

Potential for regional growth

The regional economic challenges are strongly linked to place and the changes in identity. As one participant said:

“There is a real challenge around reimagining the local economy. Historically there was considerable industry, provided working class employment. That has pretty much gone – ship building, cable laying the docks; we had a large Ford factory and other light industry all over the city. How do we reimagine the economy and create meaningful, well-paid jobs for local people and keep that money in the local economy?” (third sector)

One framing was the untapped potential within the M3 corridor. The region – including the cities, Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight – purportedly share the biggest socio-economic footprint outside of London.

Participants also saw potential in new businesses and start-ups, but the lack of a business-minded agenda held the region back. Separate stakeholders said that 90% of businesses in the area employed 20 people or less; 96% employed less than 5 people. Yet several small or lifestyle businesses often do not last beyond three years. A greater understanding of what success and scalability would look like was felt to be a crucial part of economic growth.

Multiple stakeholders expressed a desire to achieve net zero alongside economic growth, but as one participant commented “*we want to be a green carbon neutral city, but we need carbon reducing businesses*”. There was no further comment on what they might be, and it appears a gap in the interviews that more businesses were not defining sustainable economic growth within the context of environmental sustainability.

One of the biggest opportunities identified – across all topics – was the latent potential in the international arena for economic development and trade. As one participant commented, the region was “*not great at attracting foreign investment... that’s better done sector by sector at a regional level*” (**public sector**). As this is underdeveloped, there is a freedom and flexibility for international trade research to support the marketing and promotion of the central South. In truth, while stakeholders saw the potential for the region on the international arena, there was little understanding of what works or sells. As one commented:

“We do a lot of very transactional, responsive work... The DIT aren’t caring about the region, they’re caring about big organisations. Major ports signal a brand value for international trade; we need to drive that... brand around it. To do that, we need to understand international trade. We can then tell Government why they don’t understand it – what are the obstacles, the mindset, and how we can overcome this” (**private sector**).

This links back to the first section, and the sense by many that the Government calvary isn’t coming – the real opportunities lie in going it alone.

Opportunities for researchers: What is the future economy and place?

As is common throughout this report, participants wanted to know what do people want and what are the best strategies to achieve it? By this, private sector participants were interested in how people can be encouraged to stay in the region. Linked to the issues around skills shortages, they wanted to know how the design of a place can encourage workers to stay and economically participate. Public sector participants were more interested in how people interact with their local areas and what would improve their quality of life. While also naturally concerned with people wanting to stay and work in the area, the language used was more attuned to improving the lives of residents.

Likewise, motivations for improving the local economy differed across sectors. The private sector, while certainly motivated by profit, were concerned primarily with the sustainability of their industries: being able to grow to meet demand; remaining competitive against other businesses; investment in innovation and business

development; and being able to take long-term decisions. In contrast, the public sector spoke of the need for growth to support better public services, and a need to understand both the economic infrastructure required now and for the future, alongside the barriers to development. These different starting points still led to similar questions, as shown in figure 12., indicating that an understanding of the economic prospects in the region may be a sensible starting place to a shared narrative of place.

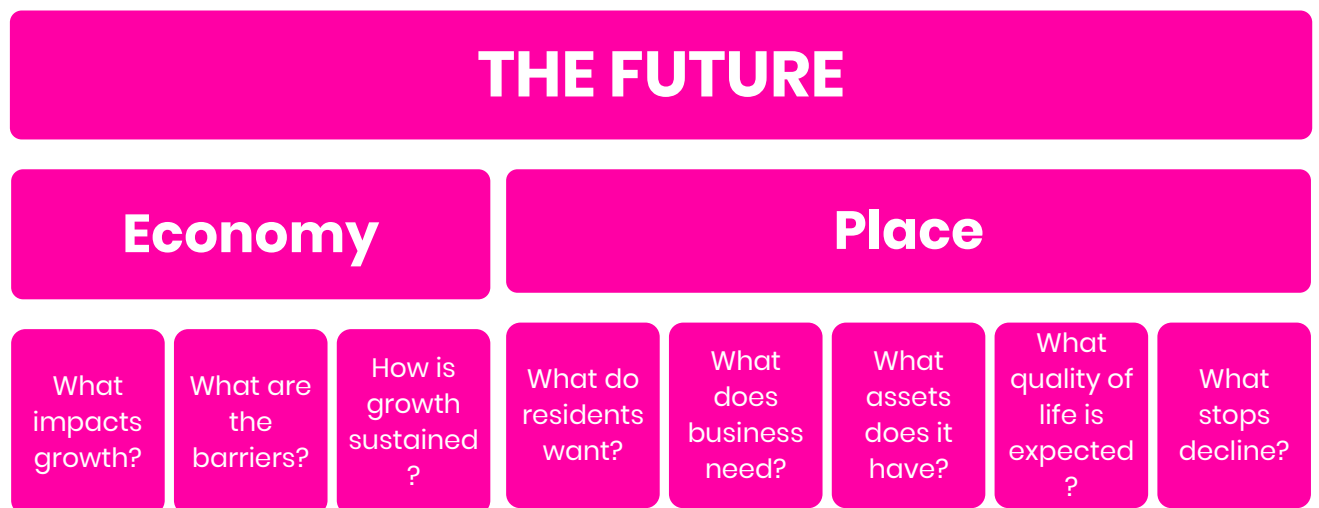


Figure 13: Questions for the future economy and place

Data and evidence on both place-making and economic growth is sought after by these stakeholders to address these questions and more. When making decisions now, which will impact generations for many years in the future, they are understandably keen to get things right. There was however a lack of specificity in their comments. While they focused on questions around high street decline and place shaping there seems a hesitancy in committing to a future direction. Being at the infancy of decision-making thus provides a valuable opportunity for researchers to have greater impact and test bold and innovative solutions across a range of disciplines.

Section 6: Improving physical infrastructure and capital

“We need a regional transport strategy that benefits everyone which has to be carbon friendly” (private sector).

Improving infrastructure in a carbon-neutral way was the most common long-term strategic priority. Technical and experiential data is likely to be particularly useful, providing some of the much needed detail around decarbonisation techniques and innovative solutions which better use the region’s natural assets.

Summary of research questions

Broadly there are two themes which research could usefully address:

- What infrastructure is fit for the future?
- How can we encourage behavioural changes to live differently?

Participants saw active travel and electrification as priority policy areas, although they lacked understanding of what a green economy means. Greater collaboration – including direct advice on how to achieve these ambitions – between industry, the public sector and academia would be well-suited to addressing these concerns.

Infrastructure in the region

The region has a “*complex infrastructure problem*” (private sector) due to its geographic and political landscape. Much of it was built in the Victorian area which makes it both expensive and complicated to improve. In terms of transport, the region has two motorways, an airport, ports, and extensive railway links, however the aging infrastructure makes east to west connectivity difficult:

Trains and railways: “*The train network is a challenge*” (public sector), with issues including low provision of direct high-speed links to London; a lack of regular and reliable trains connecting the region’s cities; weak digital connectivity and Wi-Fi; and the location of train stations outside city centres which forces people to make short journeys by car.

Cars and roads: Access to new sites marked for development is poor, with narrow roads or bridges needing to be redeveloped to be usable. The journey time across the region is highly variable, with one example being that it can take anywhere from 35 minutes to 1 hour 15 minutes to travel 26 miles to work. Yet car use remain the only option for many: “*roads are getting really bad but there are no other options. You’re lucky if you live on a train line*” (public sector).

Without change to the transport infrastructure of the region, including building new roads, redesigning railways, and changing current road layouts, the private sector was concerned that developments would be hampered. And yet, as with challenges around regeneration, the options to build are limited by space. Similar problems exist with the viability of electrification of cars in rural areas. There seems little concrete plans on how to overcome these difficulties; as one participant summarised *“I’m an optimist so I’m confident we’ll get there. Most of my colleagues think it’s impossible”* (**private sector**).

But infrastructure challenges are not limited to transport; there are equally concerns around housing, schools and health services which are intimately linked. This is *“incredibly controversial among residents and politicians”* (**public sector**) but as one public sector participant explained, there is a delicate balance between balancing housing development and public services often not felt by residents: a few 100 houses might stretch services but a significant development requires new investment. In contrast, people want new public services, but density of population is what drives those new services. The challenge is it appears that there is *‘no attempts to work together understand or work together.’* As one stakeholder said:

“We carry on building because of the housing crisis but infrastructure lags – it needs to be in synergy. Infrastructure almost needs to be built first.” (**private sector**).

Such an approach is being tried by one public sector participant, who is developing a social housing programme by building the road and installing a ground source heat pump first. The project is due to be completed over the next ten years, evaluation of which would provide significant lessons for others.

Sitting across both transport and housing is the ongoing challenge of decarbonisation including not enough money to invest, little understanding of the actions needed, or if understanding and funding *is* there, overcoming challenges with changing existing infrastructure. This results in various options that businesses and organisations could adopt, without any clarity of direction or drive to action.

What is needed?

Multiple stakeholders identified a need for a strategic transport plan as the greatest regional collaboration opportunity. Joined up working was seen as vital to address the fragmented nature of infrastructure ownership – with councils owning some roads, other bodies owning motorways and rail – but businesses reliant on the network for their own growth.

The public sector wanted more funding and more power at the regional level to improve infrastructure. As one put it “*key infrastructure challenges can only be secured by investment*” (**public sector**). The public and private sector relationship in this topic also appears more heavily strained, with the private sector often blaming planning and the public sector concerned over “*the way private sector delivers housing and controls supply.*” (**public sector**). Linking this back to the sections on identity and power means that solutions there could underpin answers to the problems noted here.

Opportunities for researchers

In how to overcome these problems, participants were consistent with how the transport system should operate: it should be decarbonised and with an emphasis on active travel. Yet the core blockers identified were space, funding, and people’s daily habits. As one participant said:

“We’re so far away from what we need. There’s a very long way to go with behaviours and people don’t understand how far away we are. How we do that?” (**public sector**).

The need for behavioural insights and climate change actions is replicated at the national level, but the regional problem is compounded by the lack of space to build. This creates both an urgency to solve the issue and an opportunity for more innovative solutions.

Multiple private sector stakeholders mentioned the potential for novel solutions such as water taxis and electric river boats to not only alleviate infrastructure issues but assist with regional identity: “*Why are we not inventing shuttle ferries on the sea? Low-cost tramways?*” (**private sector**). This in turn would help contribute to growing a youthful, creative, population willing to stay or relocate to the area. As one put it “*water taxis are cool*” (**private sector**).

While that singular example is just that; there is potential for improved infrastructure to drive forward the other strategic priorities noted in this report. Linking the capital investment into physical infrastructure to the strategic plans for the vision of place and economy will have indirect benefits for skills, workforce retention, and the health, happiness, and resilience of communities. Learning from what works and being exposed to novel and creative visions of the future, could be one of the most potent relationships for the region and academic researchers.

It was perhaps surprising that the green agenda and decarbonisation did not feature more heavily as a priority of those interviewed. This may be because it is

embedded in a large proportion of organisational strategies: “it’s so *inherent* we often don’t see it (**private sector**).” Or it may be as one participant said:

*The green economy, net zero, carbon I’m not sure anyone gets it. If you adopt this online handbook on “50 things you could be doing”, it will impact the bottom line. Nuts and bolts – is it going to cost anything? What’s the real benefit to me? (**private sector**).*

For those researchers interested in behaviours around the green agenda, while community behavioural research was considered useful, it may be beneficial to examine business attitudes too.

Conclusion and next steps

This report has set out a series of interconnected priorities identified by senior decision-makers. While there are naturally limitations in extrapolating regional priorities from a handful of stakeholders, those spoken to were both senior and connected to multiple organisations meaning they had a broad overview of the core issues. While some stakeholders were chosen because they did not have those connections – so to avoid group think – it was striking that they all still identified similar building blocks which would grow regional capital. Figure 14 summarises the main gaps in strategic understanding and the relationship between building capitals.

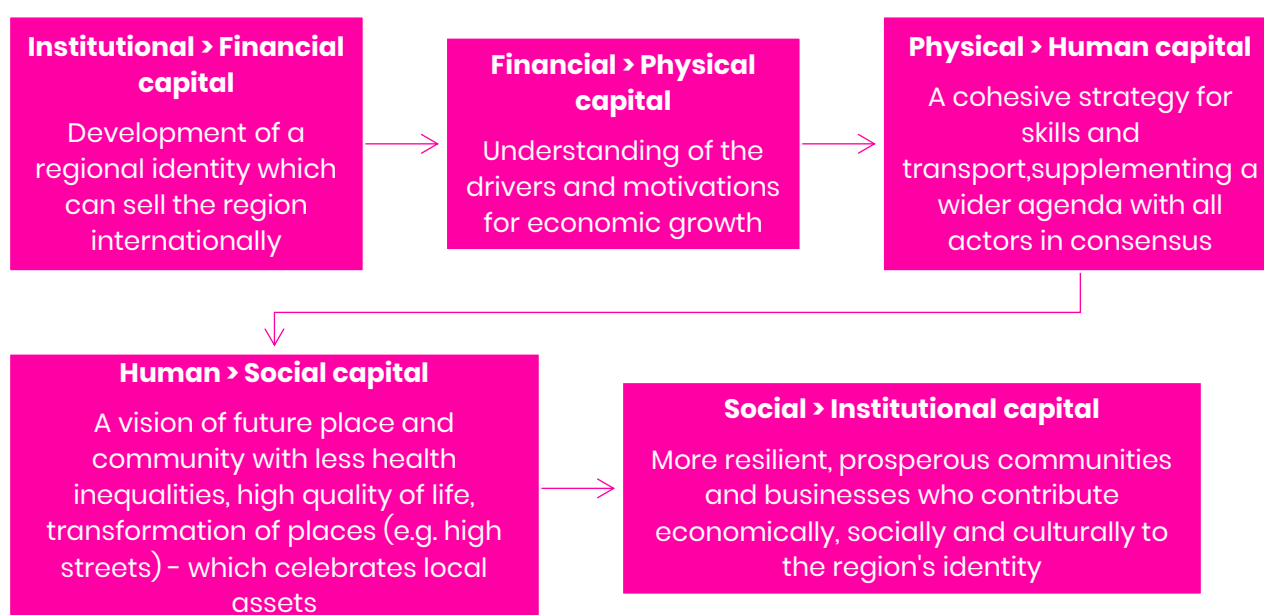


Figure 14: Priorities linked to building capital.

Not all issues identified in this report will align with university strengths, and not all regional issues were identified by stakeholders. Senior decision makers also speak in language of solutions and answers, whereas academic research often turns up more questions than it addresses. In all topics though, stakeholders were concerned about the how; **how can stakeholders achieve their aims, and how can research help them do so?** There is a clear need to align the intellectual capacity of local universities to some of the greatest social issues that the region faces. This report should be used as a snapshot of those issues, to be developed on and expanded on by those researchers in the Centre for the South.

Following this report, the Centre for the South will continue to develop its plans to launch. For further information, please contact the Centre directly.