Investment in Places series

Places Campaign: Summary and Insights

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Abstract

This Insights Paper summarises the Investment in Productive Places Campaign (Phase 1) which was an action research project led by The Productivity Institute between 2023-2026.

The campaign was designed to help UK localities strengthen productivity and prosperity by developing a richer evidence base on their distinctive assets. Working with local stakeholders, the project applies a seven-capitals framework - covering physical, human, intangible, financial, social, institutional and natural capital - to help inform strategic investment decisions at the local authority level.

In this report we discuss what productivity in places means and how this can be improved to help living standards. We describe the capitals framework and the qualitative and quantitative research methods utilised in the campaign, including the experimental data tool we developed. We then briefly summarise the findings from each of our eight place reports and offer a practical guide to creating a Local Growth Plan for Strategic Authorities. Our conclusions highlight several key lessons for policy and practice.

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Executive Summary

The Investment in Productive Places Campaign, led by The Productivity Institute, has been designed to help UK localities strengthen productivity and prosperity by developing a richer evidence base on their distinctive assets. Working with local stakeholders, the project applies a seven-capitals framework—covering physical, human, intangible, financial, social, institutional and natural capital—to help inform strategic investment decisions at the local authority level. Conventional measures such as GDP capture only part of what shapes local prosperity. By focusing on the full range of capitals, the campaign encourages policymakers to identify the assets a place already possesses, understand how these assets interact, and assess where gaps or weaknesses may hold back development. This helps reveal both the conditions that can generate virtuous cycles of productivity growth and the constraints that may lock places into cycles of decline. The campaign has worked with eight places across the UK to develop a capitals data toolkit, produce policy-relevant insights and support collaboration across the public, private and community sectors. Each participating place has been developing substantial investment plans and growth strategies. By aligning research insights with national policy priorities and supporting devolved decision-making, the project aims to promote inclusive and sustainable improvements in living standards and wellbeing across the UK through an investment and productivity lens.

What We Did

The study used a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to assess a place's productivity drivers and the strength of its seven capitals. Quantitatively, the team assessed The Productivity Institute Laboratory's scorecards, compared sector strengths for the eight industrial strategy sectors and developed an experimental data tool to benchmark the place against its regional and UK averages using baskets of indicators for the capitals. Qualitatively, insights were gathered through a stakeholder survey, a workshop and follow-up interviews with representatives from public, private and community sectors.

What We Found: Key Insights for Policy

The research points to the following policy insights:

1. **Adopt a Place-Based Investment Strategy**
    - Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence is essential for an integrative place-based investment strategy.
    - Capital assets should be linked to local productivity drivers so they can be used more strategically.
    - Tracking these drivers, comparing them with neighbouring authorities (see the Local Authority Capitals Dashboard) and monitoring change over time is vital for prioritising investment.

2. **Create a Unified Narrative and Shared Purpose**
    - Develop a coherent narrative about place-based impact to align stakeholders, attract investment and build community engagement.
    - Peer learning networks are a valuable way to share and adapt best practice.

3. **Strengthen Institutional and Social Capital**
    - Trust, leadership capacity and collaborative governance are prerequisites for an effective successful place-based investment strategy.
    - Improving coordination and delivery strengthens stakeholder engagement and horizontal governance.

4. **Invest in Human Capital and Skills Development**
    - Education and training should be aligned with existing and emerging sector needs, including clean energy and digital technologies, important for successful delivery.
    - Lifelong learning, apprenticeships and graduate retention are core elements of a human capital investment strategy.

5. **Improve Infrastructure and Connectivity**
    - Better transport and digital infrastructure support mobility, remote work and spatially dispersed business growth.
    - Addressing rural and coastal connectivity can remove critical bottlenecks for investment in those places.

6. **Leverage Natural and Cultural Capital**
    - Recognising environmental assets as contributors to the economy turns natural capital into a productive asset.
    - Integrating green spaces, heritage and the arts into regeneration and wellbeing strategies strengthens the broader productivity impact of investment.
    - Embedding the voluntary and community sector in strategic decision-making links productivity more closely to improved living standards.

7. **Promote Inclusive Growth and Wellbeing**
    - Addressing health inequalities, poverty and social exclusion through joined-up services makes broad-based investment more inclusive.
    - Ensuring investment benefits all residents, especially those facing disadvantages, broadens productive participation.

8. **Encourage Private Sector Investment and Innovation**
    - Sector-specific investment activities and innovation hubs can create stronger conditions for business growth.
    - Partnerships between government, academia, industry and communities strengthen support for a place-based investment strategy.

9. **Align Local, Regional, and National Strategies**
    - Coordinating actions across governance levels reduces fragmentation and policy churn.
    - Using devolution opportunities to streamline funding and empower local decision-making supports linkages between strategies at different levels of government.

10. **Design an Integrated Data Strategy**
    - Identifying dataset owners and gaps in coverage supports evidence-based policy making.
    - Collaborating with partners to create a common framework for sharing and integrating different datasets improves intelligence, monitoring and evaluation.

1. Introduction: Investment in Productive Places Campaign

The Productivity Institute's Investment in Productive Places Campaign (IPPC)[1] began in February 2023 with a pilot study in Rochdale[2]. This led to the full project commencing in June 2023 with a Theory of Change workshop with several stakeholders and experts. IPCC has built on the foundations of the Conservative Government's Levelling Up White Paper released in February 2022 (DLUHC, 2022) as well as the community capitals framework in the academic literature (see also Losada-Rojas et al, 2024). The Levelling Up White Paper addressed the substantial geographical disparities in productivity, pay, educational attainment and health in the United Kingdom (see also McCann, 2020). It was based on six capitals that provide a consistent framework and language for discussing the assets within a place - physical, intangible, human, financial, social, and institutional capital – and the role they play in productivity. In addition to this, a seventh capital -natural capital- was added to incorporate the value that natural assets provide for a place. Investment in natural capital supports environmental conservation, access to green space and contribute to net-zero targets by reducing CO_2 emissions (see Argarwala et al., 2020, and Argarwala and Marting, 2022).

In this report we summarise the key insights on why productivity is important for understanding the prosperity of a place, why investment is a critical differentiating factor, and why the relationship between investment and productivity varies between places. We relate the capitals framework to drivers of productivity that have been documented by The Productivity Institute (see van Ark et al., 2025; Watson and Ortega-Argilés, 2025; and McKeogh, et al, 2025). The work also links to the TPI Productivity Laboratory that has developed regional scorecards for the drivers of productivity, which measure the strength and weaknesses of the drivers of productivity within places.[3]

Over the course of the project, the TPI Productivity Laboratory has developed a data toolkit to help places understand how local authorities fare on the strength of capital assets relative to other places (see Silva-Ruiz, et al., 2026). Through stakeholder workshops, interviews, and surveys, we also developed a framework that explains how the capitals are conceptualised and addressed in practice. Integrating qualitative and quantitative insights enables us to better understand the ways in which these capitals intersect.

In the rest of this section, we provide a definition of productivity which relates to places. We then describe the project methodology in Section 2. Section 3 summarises our main results for each place discussing the strengths, challenges and recommendations. Section 4 provides a practical guide that can be used by Combined/ Strategic Authorities preparing Local Growth Plans and Section 5 concludes.

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[1] IPPC's website is https://www.productivity.ac.uk/regions-nations/investment-in-places/

[2] The Productivity Institute and Rochdale Development Agency (RDA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding in February 2023 as a commitment to collaborate on work to better understand and improve the productivity of the Borough of Rochdale, and to provide valuable lessons for other parts of the UK, see: https://www.productivity.ac.uk/news/the-productivity-institute-signs-mou-with-rochdale-development-agency/.

[3] See https://www.productivity.ac.uk/the-productivity-lab/the-2025-tpi-uk-itl3-productivity-scorecard-series/ for a discussion of the ITL3 2025 release and https://lab.productivity.ac.uk/ for interactive charts.

What is Productivity?

Productivity measures how efficiently and effectively an area or organisation can transform its resources into beneficial outcomes. Labour productivity is the output that each worker produces per hour.

What does productivity for place mean?

Places that raise worker productivity tend to achieve higher standards of living and wellbeing. Productivity growth can be achieved in several ways, including greater investment associated with technological change, innovation in value-creating activities and skills. However, productivity is also a result of how well governed a place is to connect the various investments needed to drive productivity. Therefore, investment-based strategies require a clear understanding of how local assets interact and reinforce one another to create productivity.[4] Enhanced productivity means that societies, people and firms are able to "do things better" by creating more value relative to the resources they use. Productivity growth therefore helps places become more prosperous, supporting higher living standards and improved well-being.

The consequences of low productivity across many places in the UK are profound. It leaves the country less prosperous than it could be (McCann, 2020), with fewer resources for investment, reduced prospects for growth and weaker prospects for improvement in living standards. Places with below-average productivity often become less competitive not only regionally or nationally but also globally. These places are typically more vulnerable to shocks, including economic, social and health crises, and cannot escape this low productivity trap without at least a modest amount of support. As a result, without concerted action, people face persistently lower incomes and lower wellbeing, which can also exacerbate social and political divisions in society.

In the UK the policy response to weak place-based productivity has been undermined by governance system that is both highly centralised in Westminster and Whitehall and deeply fragmented at the regional and local levels. This fragmentation is reflected in conflicting and frequently shifting policy priorities, alongside high levels of policy churn. Consequently, funding for investment is often dispersed, confusing, overlapping and incoherent, and tends to encourage places to compete with one another rather than work collaboratively (see Westwood, et al, 2022).

It is therefore important for productivity to contribute to "inclusive growth" where three things crucially matter (The Productivity Institute, 2024):

- Broad-based access to resources for growth, reflected in the capitals.
- Methods and tools to transform resources to outputs, including technology, innovations, organisational and social changes that reduce waste of financial resources, time, people's capabilities and environmental assets.

[4] For a blueprint on boosting UK's productivity see the Productivity Agenda, Coyle, et al (2023).

- A wide distribution of the gains across society so that firms and people are brought along in the process of "structural change" (economically and socially).

Capitals Framework

The seven-capitals framework is an integrative approach to investment with the purpose of improving productivity and strengthening economic resilience in a place. It identifies key assets that contribute to growth and well-being, emphasising that these capitals are interconnected. Investment in one capital can trigger positive effects across others.

The seven capitals can be briefly described as follows:

Physical Capital includes tangible assets like infrastructure, housing, transport networks, and machinery. Strong physical capital improves connectivity, reduces barriers to economic activity, and supports efficient production.

Human Capital refers to the skills, health, and experience of the workforce. Investments in education, training, and health services enhance productivity by enabling people to use other resources effectively.

Intangible Capital covers innovation, ideas, intellectual property and digital capabilities. It supports technological progress and competitiveness through research and development, knowledge-sharing networks and the diffusion of new practices.

Financial Capital refers to the availability of financial resources for businesses and households. Access to finance supports entrepreneurship, business growth, and the ability to invest in new technologies and markets.

Social Capital encompasses networks, trust, and community relationships that enable cooperation and collective action. Strong social capital supports resilience and inclusive growth by connecting people and organisations.

Institutional Capital relates to governance, leadership, and the capacity of local institutions to design and implement effective policies. Strong institutions coordinate resources, attract investment, and build confidence among stakeholders.

Natural Capital consists of environmental assets like green spaces, clean air, water and biodiversity. Investing in natural capital supports sustainability, health, and climate resilience, aligning economic growth with net-zero goals.

2. Methods and Approaches of the Investment in Productive Places Campaign

The aim of the IPPC has been to help policymakers understand how the seven capitals approach can inform an investment strategy that supports productivity. We developed quantitative and qualitative analysis to create a clearer narrative around the seven capitals, helping policymakers understand how scarce resources can be allocated more effectively to improve the impact of local investment strategies.

Table 1 lists the place visits, dates and number of interviews for our campaign. The pilot phase of IPPC focused on Rochdale (part of Greater Manchester, North West of England). The first cohort of the study included four local authorities: Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (Northern Ireland) and three London Boroughs that make up most of the Upper Lee Valley (Haringey, Enfield, and Waltham Forest). In the second cohort of the campaign, we worked with five places: Newport (Wales); Great Yarmouth (East Anglia); Walsall (West Midlands); Cumberland (North West of England) and South Tyneside (North East of England).

Table 1: Summary of Places, Workshop and Interviews

Place	Workshop	Interviews
Rochdale	15/1/24	8
Fermanagh & Omagh	Enniskillen: 21/5/24 Omagh: 22/5/24	8
Upper Lea Valley, London Boroughs of Haringey, Enfield and Waltham Forest	Walthamstow: 4/6/24	7
Newport	29/11/24	6
South Tyneside	South Shields: 4/2/25	6
Cumberland	Carlisle: 14/3/25	6
Walsall	20/3/25	6
Great Yarmouth	16/5/25	6

Programme of Action Research

In its broadest terms, the aim of this project was to help stakeholders use the capitals framework to have productive conversations on a broad-based investment strategy for productivity within each place, between different places, and between places and central government. We enabled these conversations by developing the seven capitals into a shared framework and language through which stakeholders could discuss their economic situation and how it might be improved. The project has been highly collaborative in nature, reflecting both the buy-in required and the need for the framework to be useful to a wide range of stakeholders involved (or who ought to be involved) in investment and productivity-relevant conversations. Before each workshop, the research teams visited each place and reviewed its main areas of investment.

Qualitative Analysis: Methods

We used a mixed methods approach to deepen our understanding of how some of the most abstract and difficult to quantify elements of the capitals framework were being thought about in practice. The qualitative analysis helped inform our understanding of how social, institutional and intangible capital were understood and used by stakeholders. However, we did not exclude physical, financial, human and natural capital: all seven capitals were included in the analysis. In addition to gaining insights into how the capitals are understood across a range of stakeholders, we were also interested in the interdependencies between the capitals. The qualitative analysis adds depth to the research by making abstract concepts, particularly social and institutional capital, observable in practice. It translated these theoretical constructs into place-specific mechanisms that guide investment choices, enabling a clearer understanding of how they operate within local contexts.

We used three qualitative methods to broaden our understanding of how key stakeholders in places understand and apply the capitals framework. These included a baseline survey on local understandings of productivity which gathered both descriptive and ranked responses; stakeholder workshops, where key actors from across each place shared their views on the capitals in relation to their experience of working locally; and semi-structured interviews, where participants were asked questions with particular emphasis on institutional and social capital.

Participants were selected according to two broad criteria: first, whether their experience aligned with one of the capitals, recognising that some roles cross over into other capitals; and second, the strategic importance of their organisation to the place. We gained insights from a broad and diverse range of key stakeholders across different organisations, sectors and levels of seniority. Participants included representatives from further and higher education, local government, the business community, the voluntary and community sector, transport, civic society, finance and the environment sector.

The qualitative research provides insights into how people engage with the capitals in practice and how these capitals operate within places. Critically, it illuminates issues that would not otherwise be commonly captured by traditional metrics. This is especially applicable to capitals such as social and institutional capital, where factors such as trust, convening power and collaborative capacity play a central role.

By combining the baseline survey, stakeholder workshops and interviews, the qualitative research provides breadth through the survey, shared narratives through the workshops and depth through the interviews. The latter were particularly valuable for exploring institutional capital, governance and collaboration in greater detail. This approach helps distinguish recurring thematic issues from organisation-specific views. It also enables us to map the interdependencies across the seven capitals and better understand how they connect. This has also enabled us to rank opportunities by *perceived impact* and *deliverability*, combining the data findings across the capitals with perceived local perspectives (see Figure 1).

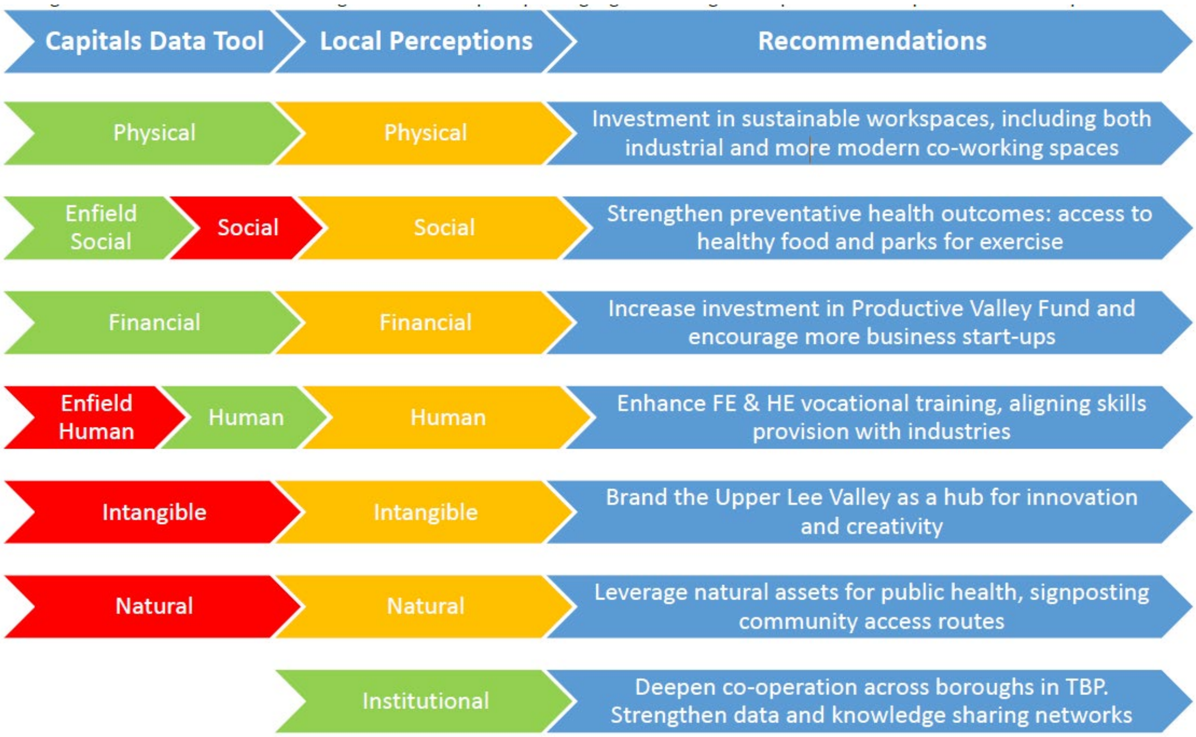
Quantitative Method: Productivity and Capitals Data

We assess a range of data for each place. Each local authority IPPC report combines quantitative and qualitative analysis of capital asset indicators. The headline measure of labour productivity is analysed for each local authority, alongside a four-type taxonomy developed by The Productivity Lab[5]. This taxonomy cross-plots productivity levels against productivity growth since 2008, showing how each place productivity compares with its regional average (at the ITL1 level) and with neighbouring local authorities. It classifies places

[5] See https://lab.productivity.ac.uk/tools/uk-regional-productivity-growth/taxonomy/

according to whether their productivity performance since 2008 has been steaming ahead, catching up, losing ground or falling behind.

Figure 1: Colour Coded Capitals Data Tool and Local Perceptions, Upper Lee Valley (includes the London Boroughs of Haringey, Enfield and Waltham Forest)



Source: Investment in Places report for the Upper Lee Valley, see the Executive Summary of Penney et al (2026). Note: The first column is from the capitals data tool. The colour coding signifies: green for local authorities in the top third of the ranking (1-120), amber for the middle third of the ranking (121-240) and red for the bottom third of the ranking (241-361). Local perceptions gauge the strength of capitals from the qualitative workshop and interviews. TBP is the Tri-Borough Partnership.

Next in the place reports, we present scorecard data for each local authority showing how its key economic measures (productivity, GDP per capita and income per capita) compare with its parent region. The scorecards, which use ONS data, also report the main drivers of productivity, including the current level of each data series and its change over the short, medium and long-run. For monetary variables, we use constant price measures to calculate the growth rates. The aim of this analysis is to compare each place with the regional aggregate and to understand the growth trajectory over time. While short term volatility in the data may cause spurious readings, medium and long-term trends should be monitored closely as they can reveal bottlenecks that need to be addressed.

Experimental Data Tool

Finally in the place reports we discuss the data tool, the TPI Local Authority Capitals Dashboard, which enables places to compare themselves with other local authorities across the UK (Silva-Ruiz, et al., 2026)[6]. The Dashboard assesses the subregional capital endowments under the capitals framework using a range of productivity-related indicators and drivers. Covering all 361 Local Authorities in the UK relative to their ITL1 parent region, the dashboard can also be used as a tool by policymakers to assess the status of key capitals, including human, social, physical, natural, financial and intangible capital.

Figure 1 illustrates how the rankings from the data tool are combined with the local perceptions for a specific place, in this case the Upper Lee Valley (Penney, et al, 2026). The first column is the colour coding derived from the capitals data toolkit. The second column summarises local perceptions of the strength of capitals based on the qualitative workshop and interviews. The final column presents the place recommendations.

3. Place Findings and Recommendations

This section briefly summarises the key findings for each of the participating councils, listing the strengths, challenges and recommendations.

Rochdale

Rochdale is a town with a rich industrial heritage, once a global leader in cotton production and the birthplace of the co-operative movement. Its historical significance is reflected in landmarks like the Grade I listed Town Hall and its role in pioneering social and economic reforms during the Victorian era. However, the decline of traditional manufacturing in the late 20th century left deep scars, contributing to persistent socio-economic challenges such as high deprivation, lower wages, and health inequalities. Despite these difficulties, Rochdale has shown resilience, narrowing productivity gaps with more prosperous boroughs and maintaining strong social networks. Its identity as a place of innovation and co-operation remains a powerful asset for shaping its future.

Today, Rochdale stands at a pivotal moment with major investment opportunities, notably the Atom Valley Mayoral Development Zone and initiatives in advanced materials and sustainable manufacturing. These projects, alongside regeneration efforts in the town centre and improved transport connectivity, offer a platform for inclusive growth. The borough's strengths lie in its manufacturing base, committed local institutions, and vibrant voluntary sector. To unlock its potential, Rochdale must align physical, human, and social capital—creating high-quality jobs, improving skills, and fostering collaboration across fractured networks, see Sensier et al (2024). By combining future-oriented innovation with immediate community needs and leveraging its strong social fabric, Rochdale can transform its narrative from post-industrial decline to a hub of sustainable prosperity and well-being.

Strengths: Atom Valley development, manufacturing sector, strong social networks.

[6] See https://lab.productivity.ac.uk/tools/investment-in-places/

Challenges: Community disconnected from major investments.

Recommendations:

- Create a unified narrative around Atom Valley.
- Improve transport links (e.g., bus routes to employment sites).
- Align human, social, and institutional capital to foster inclusive growth.
- Leverage social capital for community engagement and co-production.

Fermanagh and Omagh

Fermanagh and Omagh is the largest district by land area in Northern Ireland. Yet it has the smallest population, making it the most sparsely populated area in the devolved nation (Sensier et al., 2026). It is predominantly rural, with two main towns—Enniskillen and Omagh—and borders the Republic of Ireland, giving it strong cross-border trade links. The district has an aging population, a relatively high share of under-16s, and a lower working-age ratio than the NI average. Its economy is characterised by a high concentration of micro-businesses, strong agricultural and manufacturing sectors, and growing tourism potential linked to natural assets such as the Fermanagh Lakelands and the Sperrins. Key drivers of productivity include a relatively high export intensity supported by its border location, a strong manufacturing base, and growing investment in physical and intangible assets such as ICT and innovation hubs.

Fermanagh and Omagh's productivity, measured as Gross Value Added (GVA) per hour, stood at £36.70 in 2022—above the Northern Ireland average (£34.70) but below the UK average (£39.70). Over the long term, the district has shown stronger productivity growth than Northern Ireland, particularly during recovery phases after the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 downturn, despite weaker job resilience. Even with challenges in infrastructure, financial capital, and skills utilisation, the area benefits from strong social capital, renewable energy generation, and strategic investment plans under the Mid South West Growth Deal, aiming to boost productivity, connectivity, innovation and sustainability.

Strengths: High social capital, strong export sector, cross-border trade.

Challenges: Lower business dynamism, fragmented identity, infrastructure gaps.

Recommendations:

- Develop a cohesive place-based narrative.
- Accelerate business support and cross-border collaboration.
- Invest in childcare, green industries, and tourism branding.
- Promote social enterprise and inclusive economic growth.

The Upper Lee Valley (Haringey, Enfield and Waltham Forest London Boroughs)

The three London Boroughs of Haringey, Enfield, and Waltham Forest within the Upper Lee Valley are working together in a Tri-Borough Partnership to increase investment opportunities (Penney et al., 2026). In terms of the capital's data tool, all three boroughs rank highly for physical and financial capital, with Enfield showing stronger social capital and

Waltham Forest and Haringey performing better on human capital. However, natural capital is a major challenge, as all boroughs fall in the bottom 20% nationally for emissions performance. Productivity levels are below the London average, with Enfield slightly above the UK average but losing ground, while Haringey and Waltham Forest have experienced long-term declines. Historical investment trends show stagnation or decline, except for some recent gains in Enfield. However, employment growth has been concentrated in lower-wage sectors, contributing to productivity stagnation.

Sector analysis reveals that all boroughs have a degree of specialisation in creative industries, with Haringey also strong in entertainment and apparel manufacturing, Enfield in construction, warehousing, and beverage production, and Waltham Forest in security services and computer repair. Despite these strengths, the boroughs face structural challenges such as skills mismatches, low intangible capital (innovation and digitalisation), and persistent inequalities. Housing affordability remains a critical issue, with ratios significantly above the national average. There are also marked disparities in health and life expectancy between wards in the boroughs. Qualitative insights from stakeholder workshops and interviews highlight a strong commitment to collaborative governance, inclusive growth, and data-driven decision-making. Innovative projects, such as Enfield's district heat network and Waltham Forest's creative hubs, demonstrate proactive approaches to sustainability and economic development.

Strengths: Strong partnerships, creative industries, data-driven governance.

Challenges: Commercial space affordability, funding uncertainty.

Recommendations:

- Share best practice from the tri-borough partnership arrangements with other councils.
- Maintain and deepen collaborative governance and knowledge sharing.
- Improve data collection and sectoral analysis.
- Invest in inclusive workspaces and green infrastructure.
- Strengthen education-business partnerships to retain talent.

Newport

Newport has experienced strong productivity growth—23% between 2008 and 2023, placing it in the "steaming ahead" category compared to the average for Wales (Sensier et al., 2026d). Newport has sectoral strengths in advanced manufacturing (notably in semiconductors), clean energy, life sciences, and digital technologies. However, it faces barriers to growth including poor health outcomes and high economic inactivity. Newport's main growth levers include its strategic location within the Cardiff Capital Region and the Western Gateway area to attract investment and talent.

Recommendations focus on six key areas: establishing a shared vision and governance framework; strengthening human capital through targeted education, training, and graduate retention schemes; improving connectivity via new rail stations and expanded broadband; marketing Newport's sector strengths to investors; fostering innovation through cluster development and quadruple helix collaboration; and addressing institutional and intangible capital gaps by promoting leadership and trust.

The report stresses the need for a cohesive vision in Newport to align public, private and civic actors. This holistic approach will help integrate economic and social priorities, aiming to build resilience and inclusive growth. By combining infrastructure upgrades, skills strategies, and collaborative partnerships, Newport can position itself as a competitive hub for high-value industries while improving wellbeing and reducing regional inequalities.

Strengths: High productivity growth, sector diversity, strong business starts.

Challenges: Poor health outcomes, low investment in ICT and intangibles.

Recommendations:

- Establish a shared vision across partners in the area.
- Improve transport and digital infrastructure.
- Align education and training with growth sectors.
- Promote inclusive growth and better welfare outcomes.

South Tyneside

The study on South Tyneside consistently highlights it as being a place of pride, care and a strong sense of fairness. While it understands its challenges, it is proactively and collaboratively adopting a forward-looking perspective (Sensier et al., 2026a). There are good relationships across the public, private and community sectors and these strong partnerships are key to the realisation of a bold vision for inclusive growth. Strong partnerships across key institutions and sectors are supported by access to robust and reliable data.

This evidence base has enabled informed decision-making on critical issues, helping to overcome potential barriers to progress. There is a clear desire for greater consistency in service planning and delivery, with a strong emphasis on learning from both internal and external expertise, including think tanks and academic institutions.

Strengths: Strong institutional relationships, inclusive ethos and the South Tyneside Pledge.

Challenges: Low productivity, poor health, fragmented funding.

Recommendations:

- Invest in human capital and preventative health.
- Improve transport connectivity.
- Reform funding to support long-term social value.
- Strengthen external messaging to attract investment.

Cumberland

Cumberland benefits from strong social capital, active community networks, and growing institutional capacity, particularly with the creation of the Cumbria Combined Authority, which will bring new funding and strategic powers. Cumberland has lower productivity levels than the North West of England and weaker physical and financial capital, despite having high employment rates and notable strengths in clean energy, manufacturing, agriculture, and natural capital, see Sensier et al (2026b). Challenges such as poor transport infrastructure, fragmented investment, and an ageing population constrain growth.

Opportunities for improvement lie in leveraging Cumberland's natural assets, emerging innovation hubs, and clean-energy specialisms to foster a more resilient and diverse economy. Strategic priorities include improving transport infrastructure, enhancing digital connectivity, fostering university-industry collaboration, and expanding training in green, digital and rural skills. The study emphasises integrated planning across land use, skills, infrastructure, and innovation, alongside targeted regeneration in deprived areas and stronger place-marketing to reposition Cumberland as a hub for sustainable investment. By aligning natural capital with economic objectives and strengthening institutional collaboration, Cumberland can move from low productivity growth toward inclusive and sustainable long-term growth.

Strengths: Natural capital, investment from the nuclear sector, community-led regeneration, innovation in agriculture.

Challenges: Poor transport and digital infrastructure, aging population.

Recommendations:

- Reframe natural capital as a strategic economic asset.
- Improve broadband and transport connectivity.
- Diversify economy through green industries and innovation hubs.
- Align land use planning with environmental and productivity goals.

Walsall

Walsall is a place that is leveraging its strengths while also facing challenges (Sensier et al., 2026e). Walsall's strategic location and its efforts to create a coherent narrative to attract investment are important positives. Despite ongoing challenges, there are great opportunities for enhanced cross-boundary collaboration, and a strong partnership with Birmingham can lead to significant growth and innovation. The transition to a Strategic Authority presents an opportunity for greater autonomy but also requires careful navigation to maintain stakeholder engagement.

Walsall benefits from strong partnerships across key institutions that support a range of drivers of productivity including social and human capital. These collaborations are important for the overall growth and development of the area. Strong collaboration between the community and education sectors, supported by knowledgeable staff from local authorities and key institutions, enables rapid collective action to address urgent social issues related to these matters.

Strengths: Strategic location, strong partnerships, good transport links.

Challenges: Areas of high deprivation, lower skills levels.

Recommendations:

- Align local and regional strategies.
- Invest in adult education and vocational training.
- Promote green infrastructure and regeneration.
- Foster cross-sector collaboration and long-term planning.

Great Yarmouth

Great Yarmouth has many diverse assets to both enhance liveability and support economic growth, from natural beauty, including the coast and wetlands, thriving creative sector and circus heritage and many historical buildings of cultural significance. During our research Great Yarmouth was described as a vibrant and culturally rich place with a strong sense of community, history and character. However, it faces important challenges around skills, health and external perceptions that can be negative. Many examples were shared of community groups and local actors proactively and creatively taking actions to improve the area, focusing on jobs, well-being, education, and the arts, see Sensier et al (2026c).

Strengths: Cultural heritage, natural beauty, offshore energy potential.

Challenges: Skills mismatch, low productivity.

Recommendations:

- Develop integrated skills strategy across sectors.
- Embed cultural and natural capital into regeneration plans.
- Improve digital and physical infrastructure.
- Strengthen regional coordination and strategic planning.

4. Practical Guide for Local Growth Plans

The campaign provides useful building blocks for a practical step-by-step guide to formulating a Local Growth Plan, (including for places beyond those studied) as follows**:**

1. **Anchor the Local Growth Plan in the history and the capital assets of the place.** Places evolve over time and their current specialisms are often closely linked to economic, industrial and social history[7].
2. **Assess the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy**. This should include an assessment of industrial, service-sector, community, cultural and natural assets. Strengths and weaknesses can be compared with those of the wider regions using the Local Authority Capitals Dashboard[8], helping places understand where their capital assets are relatively strong, where they are constrained, and where investment may have the greatest impact.

[7] The introduction of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Plan provides a useful example of how a growth plan can be grounded in a place's distinctive trajectory, see: https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/resources/local-growth-plan-west-yorkshire-and-corridors-of-opportunity/

[8] https://lab.productivity.ac.uk/tools/investment-in-places/

3. **Analyse sector specialisation and future growth opportunities.** To understand local sector strengths, Combined Authorities should examine employment specialisation across key sectors, including the Government's eight priority industrial strategy sectors[9]. Local employment specialisations can be calculated with location quotients utilising the Business Register Employment Survey accessed at the 2-digit Standard Industrial Classification level.
4. **Develop a scorecard of Key Performance Indicators**. Places should identify the most important capital assets to track, using the data that are currently available[10]. Local areas should also identify gaps in data and explore where data linkages could improve monitoring and evaluation, such as linking administrative local authority data with education, health and wellbeing outcomes. A scorecard should compare local assets with those of the parent region and track changes over the short, medium and long-term. These metrics should be updated annually, including when the ONS releases subregional productivity data[11].
5. **Engage regularly with local stakeholders**. Local Growth Plans should be developed through regular dialogue with stakeholders from business, public services and community organisations. These conversations can help assess progress in the region and identify priorities for Key Performance indicators.

5. Conclusions

The **Investment in Productive Places Campaign** set out to address persistent regional productivity disparities by equipping localities with a practical, evidence-based framework to support integrated investment strategies aimed at improving place-based productivity. The aim has been to help places move beyond narrow economic metrics and adopt an integrative approach that recognises the full spectrum of capitals – physical, human, intangible, financial, social, institutional and natural that underpin prosperity and productivity. By operationalising the seven-capitals framework, the project provided insights that support local stakeholders in designing strategies that are inclusive, resilient, and specific to their distinctive contexts.

To achieve this, quantitative analysis – including productivity scorecards, sector benchmarking, and an experimental data tool – was combined with qualitative research through surveys, stakeholder workshops, and interviews. This mixed-methods approach allowed capturing both measurable drivers of productivity and the harder-to-quantify factors such as trust, governance capacity, and collaborative networks. By triangulating these insights, we were able to map interdependencies across capitals and identify where strategic interventions could deliver the greatest impact.

[9] The Data City has estimated location quotients for these sectors and is developing an open-source platform: https://thedatacity.com/reports/open-sourcing-the-industrial-strategy/

[10] The Manchester Economic Strategy for example, provides a useful illustration of how indicators can be organised and monitored, see page 67: https://www.manchester.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/council-policies-and-strategies/investing-in-success-an-economic-strategy-for-manchester

[11] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/regionalandsubregionallabourproductivityuk2024

Most places studied as part of this project experienced both low productivity levels and weak growth over time. Many also contain areas of significant deprivation, with higher rates of child poverty and pronounced health inequalities. In the London boroughs, strong labour market growth has been associated with lower productivity jobs that have been added in the foundational and gig economy. In other places, creating new local opportunities has proved difficult.

These local challenges have been compounded by a succession of shocks since the financial crisis. Some areas, such as Rochdale and in Fermanagh and Omagh, have shown limited labour market resilience, with employment taking a long time to recover. Austerity has placed pressure on public services; Brexit has affected export trade; Covid-19 has increased illness among the working-age population; and rising energy prices, driven by geopolitical events, have fuelled the cost-of-living crisis.

At the same time, all places have distinctive industrial, service and community strengths. In some cases, stronger collaboration is needed to join up dynamic businesses with innovation and local opportunities. Building networks and peer learning to share best practice can also support continuous innovation in public services and improve life chances of the population.

Our findings highlight several key lessons for policy and practice:

- **Place-based strategies matter**: Policy that does not recognise the distinct characteristics, assets and constraints of each place is unlikely to improve local productivity. The seven-capitals approach helps local leaders tailor investment to a place's unique assets, making interventions more effective, better targeted and more sustainable over time.
- **Narrative and collaboration are critical**: A shared story of place builds confidence, attracts investment, and fosters civic pride. Strong institutional and social capital are essential, together with trust, leadership, and horizontal governance helping to align partners around common priorities and sustain action over time.
- **Skills and infrastructure drive transformation**: Investment in human capital, transport and digital connectivity underpins long-term productivity gains by improving access to jobs, skills and markets. At the same time, cultural and natural assets can be leveraged to support inclusive growth.
- **Data-informed decision-making is critical**: Monitoring the drivers of productivity, and how they change over time, is crucial for building confidence in local strategies and assessing whether they are making a difference. Combining quantitative metrics with qualitative insights ensures that strategies are grounded in robust evidence, make use of local knowledge and remain responsive to local realities.
- **Alignment across governance levels reduces fragmentation**: Coordinating local, regional, and national priorities, and using devolution effectively, can reduce policy fragmentation and create clearer routes to improving productivity. Strong alignment helps ensure that investment, skills, infrastructure and innovation policies reinforce one another, rather than pulling in different directions.

The UK's persistent regional productivity disparities should not be understood merely as economic anomalies, but as structural challenges that weaken national prosperity, resilience, and social cohesion. Investment in local economies is therefore not simply a fiscal cost, but a necessary condition for unlocking productivity potential. With adequate funding, stronger institutional capacity and greater strategic autonomy, places across the UK can move from productivity traps to virtuous cycles of investment, innovation and inclusive growth.

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