

Report to Council

23 March 2021

Subject:	West Midlands Combined Authority - Update
Director:	Director - Interim Director Regeneration & Growth Tammy Stokes
Contact Officer:	Senior Lead Officer, Sarah Sprung Sarah_sprung@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 Consider opportunities for the Borough arising from the West Midlands Combined Authority.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 Being a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority offers Sandwell Council access to funding and initiatives that positively impact the borough and the people of Sandwell.



3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

Participation as a constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority offers opportunity to contribute positively to all strategic outcomes contained in the Corporate Plan.

	Best start in life for children and young people
	People live well and age well
	Strong resilient communities
	Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods
	A strong and inclusive economy
	A connected and accessible Sandwell

4 Context and Key Issues

Emerging employment and skills proposals relating to the Adult Education Budget

4.1 Sandwell MBC plays an active role in the WMCA Employment and Skills officers group; the meeting includes representatives from all local authorities and local enterprise partnerships. This group also considers regional approaches and best practise sharing across the local area, with each local authority having their own Employment and Skills partnership to feed information to and from. Meetings have been also held at a regional level to consider West Midlands wide approaches for the new Kickstart initiative alongside the Department for Work and Pensions. The Connexions Team also supported WMCA with their Summer Careers Festival.



- 4.2 The Sandwell Skills Strategy has been developed and is an overarching document which sets out the borough's skills challenges and key priorities. The strategy is aligned to the WMCA Regional Skills plan which similarly sets out the region's skills challenges and key priorities. The Skills strategy includes an action plan for Reset and Recovery which is aligned to recovery measures proposed over the WMCA geography. A Covid-19 jobs and skills delivery board has been established to assist economic recovery in the region. A jobs and skills academy has also been established alongside strategic partners to maximise opportunities from the Commonwealth Games (CWG) including volunteering and job opportunities. This programme is working alongside Sandwell MBC activities and the legacy programme for the CWG Aquatics centre.
- 4.3 In 2020/21 the WMCA is made an investment of £21.8m in the direct delivery of community learning with five local authority areas. In Sandwell, community learning takes place at a range of community settings including outreach centres, Sandwell College, schools and wider Council community settings like our children's centres and libraries.
- 4.4 At Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service (SAFL) those adults who attend our centres voluntarily typically have clear ideas about their short term and longer-term goals and use our offer to improve their skills. We found that although learners' motives for joining our classes are diverse, they are often related to the practicalities of improving job performance and/or employment prospects, supporting their children's learning, improving their confidence and moving on to study at a higher level.

SAFL AEB Funding:

The maximum contract value for the funding year of 2020/21 is:

Maximum Contract Value (MCV): £ 1,531,498
of which Community Learning £ 1,090,598



4.5 For adults of all ages, but particularly older ones, computer literacy provides a strong motivation for improving their literacy skills, digital inclusion is a key focus for our delivery model moving into 2021. Our main strategy to increase engagement and participation of adults in Sandwell is based on the following factors: -

- i. enabling as many learners to study with full or part fee remission
- ii. using outreach venues to provide localised delivery in the heart of communities
- iii. the introduction of Online and blended learning to offer greater flexibility
- iv. the ability to create individualised programmes of learning
- v. the ability to develop bespoke learning programmes to meet the needs of local employers and community groups in upskilling/retraining their workforce and volunteers
- vi. sector specific learning opportunities to help learners get closer to the job market
- vii. focussing our subcontracting specification to broaden our offer and increase opportunities for hard to reach learners.

Economic Recovery

4.6 The WMCA has a main board attended by Council Leaders and a number of themed sub-boards which include the Strategic Economic Board, the Jobs and Skills Delivery Board, and the Economic Recovery Forum which are concerned with themes of enterprise and jobs, regional economic recovery and investment into the West Midlands Region.

4.7 Operationally the West Midlands Growth Company acts as a delivery arm of the WMCA in relation to economic development and investment into the region, they also have a relationship with the Regeneration and Growth Teams in Sandwell Council.



- 4.8 WMCA continually considers government funding being made available to improve regional infrastructure including transport infrastructure, as well as other investments into developments, education and skills projects, business support projects, enterprise and innovation and other significant projects such as High Speed 2 and the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in 2022.
- 4.9 The Strategic Economic Development Board looks at forward plans on key projects (including infrastructure); and is mindful of budgets, projects and activities being developed and delivered which promote economic opportunities and growth for businesses in the Region.
- 4.10 The WMCA is responsible for overseeing how the region's business support ecosystem is co-ordinated through the Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Hubs, responsible for co-ordinating funded specialist and generalist business advice and guidance and access to finance support working alongside Local Authorities, LEPs, Chambers of Commerce, Universities and Catapults, private providers and funders, the WMCA/WMGC, and community organisations.
- 4.11 The Economic Recovery forum exists to look at the economic effects of COVID 19 and Brexit on the region, with a focus on the effect on National Lockdown, tiering restrictions considers forecasts of economic impact; including economic support, the government's approach and regional actions being taken in response.
- 4.12 In Autumn 2020 the WMCA submitted an economic recovery plan to government on behalf of the region which was supported by Sandwell Council, the Black Country Chamber of Commerce and other partners called *'Recharge the West Midlands. Kickstarting the West Midlands Economy: Our investment case to government'* Since this began conversation and consideration on what elements of this plan will be funded and delivered is ongoing.



4.13 The 'Recharge' document has seven elements, together with emphasis on the importance of properly funded public services. Together, these elements aim to tackle the problems which are specific to the region's economic needs, exposed as a result of the post Covid-19 context: -

- Creating green manufacturing jobs
- Maximising job opportunities from HS2, City of Culture and the Commonwealth Games for local people
- Investing in healthcare innovation
- Building better transport and digital links
- Regenerating brownfield land and building more homes
- Getting people back into work
- Backing our region's businesses

4.14 Going forward the WMCA have identified two priorities as the West Midlands begins to recover economically:

- i. Delivering "Recharge the West Midlands": this means further developing robust business cases for the projects and promoting with decision-makers across government. Where funding is secured, projects must mobilise quickly and if projects do not secure investment immediately, they will be incorporated into the integrated regional pipeline.
- ii. Agreeing to refresh the region's vision, strategy and plans: while the region's recovery work is rooted in its existing agreed strategies and plans, such as the Local Industrial Strategy, Strategic Economic Plan, Regional Skills Plan, Strategic Transport Plan and Housing Deal, we know that the Covid-19 pandemic will fundamentally change the way businesses and communities operate. There, is therefore, a clear need to refresh the region's economic policies to take account of the Covid-19 changes, further embed green and inclusive growth and ensure that they are agile to be able to adapt to future economic conditions.



Climate Change

- 4.15 The WMCA have a Low Carbon Officer Group made up of officers from across the Combined Authority area, including staff from the Black Country Consortium and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM). The Climate Change Programme Manager attends meetings of this Group to ensure that Sandwell is represented and able to influence proposals, and so that our strategic direction and opportunities for delivery, remain in alignment with the region.
- 4.16 The WMCA have committed to producing four 'five-year plans' to help deliver their work on climate change and reaching net zero carbon by 2041. The areas covered by the plan include:

Circular Economy – this is a new approach to our economy which aims to eliminate waste from production processes and keeps natural resources in circulation for as long as possible.

Buildings - this covers the need to ensure that our buildings (domestic, commercial and industrial) are retrofitted with energy efficiency measures.

Communication and Behavioural Change – to reach the target of net zero carbon by 2041, a strategic approach is needed to engagement across the region to help ensure support from residents, communities, businesses, and partner organisations. Effective communication will enhance this strategic approach.

Natural Capital - the region's Natural Capital has a vital role to play in helping to reduce the impacts of climate change upon residents. A joint approach to the management of Natural Capital will help to maximise the role of this key asset and to improve the lives of residents across the Combined Authority area.

Transport – a step change is required in how people travel across the WMCA, with a significant reduction needed in the number of miles



travelled by car and a shift to active forms of travel such as walking and cycling.

Energy – reducing our demand for energy from our homes and businesses is an essential requirement in meeting the 2041 target. This will come from low carbon forms of heating and power, and from district heating schemes.

Delivery and finance options including jobs and skills – the decarbonisation of the WMCA area will present significant challenges, particularly in terms of finance and how schemes can be delivered. The process however, also presents a range of opportunities to the region in terms of new skills, new jobs and inward investment.

- 4.17 Sandwell's Climate Change Strategy has the same goal as that of the WMCA, in that we have stated that the borough will be carbon neutral by 2041. The seven areas listed above which the CA have decided to focus on, closely align with our own action plans.

Bike Share Scheme

- 4.18 Serco has now been announced as the successful bidder to operate the West Midlands cycle hire scheme. Testing of the payment platform and hire processes is now underway in Sutton Coldfield in advance of a full public launch in March.
- 4.19 Initially 1,080 bikes will be supplied across the seven districts rising to 1500 within a few months. The aim is to have around 2,500 bikes in operation by year 4/5 of the scheme.
- 4.20 Sandwell will receive 108 bikes across 18 docking stations in the first instance. It is anticipated that the first bikes in Sandwell will be available to hire in June. On reaching the full figure of 2,500 bikes overall, it is anticipated that Sandwell would receive 250 although this will be kept under review depending on the take-up. The number of bikes allocated to Sandwell is broadly in line with Sandwell's % age of the West Midlands population.



- 4.21 Work is underway to identify the location of the docking stations. These are initially likely to be concentrated in the West Bromwich and Oldbury areas, typically at railway stations, town centres and major trip attractors such as hospitals, leisure centres etc.
- 4.22 Other than the docking stations, the scheme does not involve the provision of cycle infrastructure but complements the programme of works included in the Local Cycle & Walking Infrastructure Plan.

eScooter Hire Trial

- 4.23 The Government announced its intention to trial the use of eScooters on public highways in early summer 2020. Following a WMCA procurement process, Swedish firm Voi was announced as the West Midlands operator for eScooter trials in August 2020. The first trials began in Birmingham and Coventry in September.
- 4.24 A Sandwell trial based in West Bromwich town centre began in September. 50 scooters are available for hire to anyone 18 years old or over with a valid driving licence. The scooters are dockless, using GPS tracking both to enable hirers to locate a scooter, and to ensure that the scooters do not leave the trial zone.
- 4.25 The trial will run until September with the experience gained feeding into the Department for Transport's deliberations around the full legalisation of eScooters for use on the public highway.

Active Travel (Walking & Cycling)

- 4.26 As part of the Governments Active Travel Fund (ATF), WMCA has coordinated the planning and delivery of an extensive programme schemes across all seven districts in conjunction with local Transportation and highways teams. The projects consist of infrastructure and improvements to facilitate cycling and make it easier for pedestrians to circulate safely in our town centres.



- 4.27 In Sandwell schemes were introduced during 2020 in Oldbury and Smethwick, whilst further projects will be delivered during 2021 in Bearwood, Blackheath, Wednesbury and on the A4123 in Tipton.
- 4.28 In addition to the ATF, WMCA's Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) will fund the development of further projects on the A34 in Great Barr and links between local neighbourhoods and the new stops along the Wednesbury to Brierley Hill metro extension.

Affordable Housing Delivery Vehicle (AHDV)

- 4.29 The 'Housing Deal' of March 2018 set ambitious targets for the WMCA to deliver 215,000 new homes by 2031 and Government to "work with Housing Associations methods to finance and build affordable housing to rent or buy". Increasing the supply of affordable and social housing is critical to achieving the target.
- 4.30 The West Midlands has seen significantly increased delivery of total new homes, with recent data showing an annual total of over 16,500 in 2019/20, doubling of supply in six years. However, increasing the supply of affordable homes continues to be a considerable challenge for all areas in the sector. The totals of each type of affordable housing delivered in the WMCA geography during 2019/20, with an overall total of 3,272 affordable homes in the region during the year. Sandwell showing 60 Total Additional Affordable Dwellings. Positioning Sandwell 3rd out of the 4 Black Country boroughs and 13th out of the 16 across the Combined Authority areas.
- 4.31 A collaboration has been established between the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and five of the region's leading housing associations to accelerate and increase the number of affordable homes for local people.
- 4.32 The aims of this project are to bring forward affordable homes that would otherwise not be delivered, allow for the development of brownfield land, and to promote innovative methods of construction.



4.33 A memorandum of understanding has been signed between the WMCA and five members of the West Midlands Housing Association Partnership (WMHAP) to develop a business case for driving affordable housing developments, economic activity and housing policy objectives. A full business case is being developed and is expected in Spring 2021.

4.34 The proposal provides a delivery mechanism whereby WMCA establishes multiple benefits including:

- it maintains influence over the quality, delivery and community benefits of developments through this vehicle;
- it recycles investment into further schemes, and
- it implements policy objectives centred on design, construction, brownfield development affordable housing and promoting inclusive growth.

Carbon Homes Charter and Routemap

4.35 In July 2020 In July 2020, the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) declared a climate emergency and set a challenging 80-year carbon budget. The goal is to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2041 and deliver zero-carbon homes in the region by 2025.

4.36 The Zero Carbon Homes Routemap sits alongside the Zero Carbon Homes Charter. It sets out programmes of action over the short, medium and long-term which will allow WMCA and its partners to meet ambitious targets and deliver the Charter's principles.

4.37 Partnerships across the region and throughout the supply chain are required to ensure new housing helps deliver clean and inclusive growth.

4.38 WMCA's role in delivering this ambition is three-fold:

- deploy funding in ways that secure positive outcomes on the ground.
- broker new relationships across industry, creating a culture of collaboration and innovation in the West Midlands, and growing the zero-carbon housing sector.
- work closely with local and national public, private and third sector stakeholders to develop a single voice on the approach and commitment to delivering zero-carbon homes at scale in the region.



- 4.39 Integral to the approach will be ensuring new residential development, no matter its use, tenancy or construction type, supports healthy, resilient communities.
- 4.40 The WMCA sort agreement to the principles and format of the Zero Carbon Homes Charter and Routemap in readiness for publication, and formally in early 2021. There are no implications for Sandwell as the principles are aligned to the council's commitment to Climate Change. It is the intention that the Zero Carbon Homes Charter and the Routemap should be published in the first quarter of 2021 as set out in the 2020/21 Portfolio Business Plan.
- 4.41 The UK Green Building Council's framework defines net zero carbon in terms of emissions in three ways: construction, operation and whole life. There is general agreement within the industry that the third part of the definition, meeting net zero whole life carbon, is currently aspirational.
- 4.42 The routemap is not binding on WMCA or its partners and does not include financial commitments or hold legal status. Instead, the recommendations for action will be used to guide future policy development, with full financial and legal implications considered on a case by case (and site by site) basis.
- 4.43 Delivering net zero whole life carbon across all development sites by 2025 would not be achievable within this timeframe. Approaches to this element of the definition are still being developed by UK Green Building Council and will need to be taken on board as the work progresses. The routemap, therefore, sets out a timeframe for achieving net zero emissions for each element of the definition framework (operational, embodied, whole life). This means the definition of 'ZCH' in terms of the West Midlands approach will also naturally evolve over time.

West Bromwich Town Centre Regeneration and Bull Street MSCP Demolition

- 4.44 Demolition works are progressing at pace with a cleared site expected to be delivered in Spring 2021.



4.45 In order to progress wider regeneration, a further Phase 2 funding agreement is in the process of being negotiated with WMCA, with a view to facilitating the delivery of mixed use redevelopment in line with the Council's emerging Town Centre masterplan.

Friar Park Housing Development

4.46 Following the successful joint appointment of Tibbalds Cambellreith to undertake a masterplanning exercise and to devise a land remediation strategy, it is expected that indicative masterplan options will be produced by the consultants for further consideration in Spring 2021, in advance of a programmed late summer planning application.

4.47 The Council and the WMCA are currently working on the agreement of provisional delivery strategies in accordance with the Joint Venture Agreement.

One Public Estate

4.48 One Public Estate (OPE) is a national programme, started in 2013 delivered by the Cabinet office and the LGA, now administered by the West Midlands Combined Authority.

4.49 The OPE programme is to offer technical support to deliver property focused programmes across the public sector. OPE is looking to promote a strategic asset approach to get more from public assets.

4.50 SMBC has been in discussion with the Combined Authority to contribute towards them making a regional OPE round eight submission. OPE 8 has a national allocation of £30 million, which would equate to approx. £130k per local Authority. The Sandwell element of the WMCA ask is for £150k.

4.51 The Sandwell proposal centres around West Bromwich Town Hall and central library, as we can demonstrate strategic links to the recent West Bromwich Town Fund (town investment plan) application, our own transforming local services programme and the collaborative working plans and arrangements being progressed with the NHS.



5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Become a non-constituent member of WMCA - Participation as a constituent member of the WMCA enables Sandwell to deliver improvements to the locality that would otherwise be more difficult to achieve. In addition, through WMCA activity, we can ensure that Sandwell residents have the skills to access new employment opportunities both here in Sandwell and across the region, with excellent public transport available connecting the whole of the West Midlands. These benefits would be lost if Sandwell became a non-constituent member.

6 Implications

Resources:	The contribution to the Combined Authority from Sandwell Council for 20120/21 is £0.612 million.
Legal and Governance:	Part 6 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 (“the 2009 Act”) provides for the establishment of combined authorities for the areas of two or more local authorities in England. Combined authorities are bodies corporate which may be given power to exercise specified functions of a local authority under sections 104 and 105 of the 2009 Act, and power to exercise specified functions of any other public authority under section 105A of the 2009 Act.
Risk:	Section 21 of the West Midlands Combined Authority (Functions and Amendments) Order 2017 has the effect that where costs are incurred by the Combined Authority and are not met from other sources of income, then they fall to be met by the seven constituent councils, including Sandwell.



Equality:	The priorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority reflect the equality and diversity of the West Midlands, including striving to create prosperity through a strong and collective economic strategy and the policy aspiration to champion all that makes the West Midlands a Great Place to Live. The equality impact of any specific proposals will need to be addressed in reports to the WMCA Board or the appropriate decision-making body.
Health and Wellbeing:	All constituent members of the WMCA are be better placed to contribute and influence the Health and Social Care offer for local residents and create: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more sustainable local health and care economy; • Improved quality and experience of care; • Improved population health.
Social Value	There is potential in all schemes and initiatives, particularly those delivered directly in Sandwell, to have a positive impact on Social Value.

7. Appendices

None

8. Background Papers

None

