

Report to Council

8 November 2022

Subject:	West Midlands Combined Authority - Update
Director:	Director Regeneration & Growth Tony McGovern
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1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That Council notes the update report and is asked to consider any other opportunities for the Borough arising in connection with 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

Governance

4.1 At its Board meeting on 10 June 2022 appointments were made to Combined Authority Portfolio Areas:

Portfolio

Deputy Mayor
 Culture & Digital
 Economy & Innovation
 Environment, Energy & HS2
 Finance
 Housing & Land
 Inclusive Communities
 Levelling Up
 Skills & Productivity

Lead Member

Cllr Bob Sleigh (Solihull)
 Cllr Patrick Harley (Dudley)
 Cllr Ian Brookfield (Wolverhampton)
 Cllr Ian Courts (Solihull)
 Cllr Bob Sleigh (Solihull)
 Cllr Mike Bird (Walsall)
 Cllr Kerrie Carmichael (Sandwell)
 Cllr Brigid Jones (Birmingham)
 Cllr George Duggins (Coventry)



- 4.2 The Leader of Sandwell Council has held the position of chair of the Public Service Reform Board since the WMCA was established in 2016. WMCA reviewed the function of this board and agreed that decisions relating to public service reform could be taken by the WMCA Board. Therefore, this Board has been discontinued and the Leader of Sandwell Council is now the Portfolio Lead for Inclusive Communities.
- 4.3 Sandwell Council, at its annual meeting on 24 May 2022, appointed the following members to represent the Council on WMCA fora:-

Committee	Member/s
WMCA Board	Leader of the Council - Cllr Kerrie Carmichael Deputy Leader of the Council - Cllr Bob Piper Substitutes: Cabinet Member for Communities - Cllr Danny Millard Cabinet Member for Leisure and Tourism - Cllr Laura Rollins
WMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee	Cllr Simms Cllr Taylor
WMCA Audit & Risk Assurance Committee	Cllr Allen Substitute: Cllr Padda
WMCA Environment Committee	Cabinet Member for Environment Services - Cllr Zahoor Ahmed
WMCA Investment Board	Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources - Cllr Bob Piper
WMCA Strategic Economic Delivery Board	Cabinet Member Leisure and Tourism - Cllr Laura Rollins
WMCA Growth Company	Leader of the Council - Cllr Kerrie Carmichael
City Deal, Growth Deal and WMCA Advisory Board	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth - Cllr Hughes
WMCA Housing & Land Delivery Board	Cabinet Member for Housing - Cllr Charn Singh Padda



- 4.4 The council is committed to maximise Sandwell influence, funding and wider benefits through working collaboratively and positively with the WMCA.

Trailblazer Devolution Deal

- 4.5 WMCA and Manchester Combined Authority were invited by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities to engage with them on a Trailblazer Devolution Deal (TDD) process, where they will be given the opportunity to negotiate with central government on achieving tailored devolved powers and devolved funding on a basis of what will be most beneficial for their given geographies and systems. As part of this process both combined authorities were asked to articulate how their TDD proposals will help to achieve the 12 Levelling Up missions, set out by government.
- 4.6 To address these 12 Missions, WMCA have broken down the development of their TDD into 20 separate strands. The Combined Authority has been working in partnership across the region to draw up proposals for each strand.
- 4.7 The Council has clearly articulated its “asks” from this TDD process. The priority ask from the TDD is for significant and new levels of support via different funding models, devolution of relevant capital funds and new partnerships with the Combined Authority, Private Sector and Central Government to tackle the most difficult issues that will deliver material progress on net carbon zero. This would generate a major regeneration boost for the borough in terms of new employment, new skills opportunities, SME start ups and the development of new technologies.
- 4.8 A summary of the proposals across the 20 workstreams and their benefits have been compiled into a Levelling Up Prospectus. Bilateral meetings between local authority leaders, chief executives and representatives of the WMCA took place in September to discuss the proposals.



4.9 It is uncertain what the change in government administration may mean for the TDD and Levelling Up agenda. Whatever fiscal decisions are taken in the future, the region will be in good position to articulate its needs to the new administration, having developed their TDD proposals.

City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS)

4.10 Local authorities in the region have been working with the WMCA to establish the West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS). The current West Midlands submission stands at £1.732m to reflect the ambitions of the area and to allow a deliberate level of over programming. The fund will be wholly capital in nature but is supported by a supplementary revenue fund of £8.9 million which has been received by WMCA.

4.11 CRSTS, especially when viewed alongside Active Travel and Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, provides an opportunity to plan improvements to the transport system in a more integrated way and over a more realistic delivery period, rather than quick turn-around, competitive and relatively small national funding pots.

4.12 The schedule of projects includes many projects that either sit within Sandwell or impact on transport provision in Sandwell, such as Dudley Road corridor highway improvements, cross city bus priority, integrated transport hub at Dudley Port and new cycle infrastructure.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)

4.13 UKSPF is a central pillar of the UK Government's Levelling Up agenda. Its primary goal is to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, with three key investment priorities around 'Community and Place', 'Supporting Local Business', and 'People and Skills'.

4.14 WMCA has been identified as the lead authority and accountable body for UKSPF across the seven local authority metropolitan area, with responsibility for developing its investment plan, and for delivery of the Fund. WMCA has been leading a strategic approach, working with local authorities to identify local and regional investment priorities that support the region's levelling up ambitions.



- 4.15 The overall UKSPF allocation for the region is £88.5m over the period 2022-2025. It is critical that the funds are allocated where they can have most impact for places, residents, and businesses across the region.
- 4.16 The July WMCA Board approved the submission of an outline initial investment plan, recognising the need for further work to be undertaken to determine priorities, local allocations, and administrative costs. This outline investment plan was based on the working assumption that:
- Up to 50% of UKSPF funds would be focused on 'Supporting Local Business' - to provide support to local businesses. WMCA say this will be developed with and by LAs, to ensure a broadly consistent approach to supporting businesses across the region, whilst also ensuring support is locally targeted and embedded with local delivery arrangements (eg in local authorities), complementing other local support and services to businesses.
 - 50% would be prioritised individually by local authorities, particularly in terms of directing local place and communities, and people and skills provision.
- 4.17 The WMCA allocation is based on a national approach that adopted a 70:30 methodology, of population and 'need/economic resilience'. Sandwell council have raised concerns regarding the UKSPF funding allocation methodology, in that deprivation is not the material factor in the methodology. Sandwell's position is that the UKSPF goal to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK can only be delivered if funding is allocated in a way that more fully reflects the deprivation status of the different LAs across the West Midlands.
- 4.18 The Government guidance on UKSPF identified an indicative allocation of £9.7m for Sandwell over a three year period and is a mix of capital and revenue. Skills investment can only happen in Year 3 of the programme. WMCA is the lead body for allocation of UKSPF and following the Board decision on 28 October, the position for Sandwell is as follows:
- Local allocation of £4.7m for Sandwell over three years to support local Place / Skills / Business priorities
 - Plus £2.3m business support resources for SME advisors at LA level over 3 years
 - Plus some percentage of the £3m administration cost for implementing SPF schemes



- Plus potential benefits to Sandwell businesses from the Specialist Business Support Programmes at CA / Regional level – e.g. the Decarbonisation Programme.
- The final elements of potential benefit is where the CA have identified MULTIPLY funding and some Adult Education Budget could be allocated to more deprived LAs to compensate for the low weighting that need / deprivation has been given in the SPF allocation process.

Investment Zones

- 4.19 Since taking office, the new Government's focus has been on the recently announced Investment Zones. Investment Zones aim to drive growth and unlock housing, with sites benefiting from tax incentives, planning liberalisation and wider support for the local economy.
- 4.20 The WMCA is co-ordinating the process for submission of expressions of interest for Investment Zones and is working closely with local authorities to identify the most appropriate locations.
- 4.21 The Council has submitted proposals to create a Sandwell Investment Zone along the new Metro extension currently under construction. The new Metro extension extends from Wednesbury through Great Bridge, Dudley Port and Tipton. Each of the seven West Midlands' local authorities have identified their own preferred areas for Investment Zones.
- 4.22 The Zone could attract substantial private sector investment generating new jobs and economic growth for Sandwell. If approved the six areas in a Sandwell Investment Zone could include:
- Wednesbury town centre – for housing led mixed use developments;
 - Tipton town centre – for new housing;
 - Hill Top, West Bromwich – bringing forward land for new employment uses;
 - Great Bridge – opportunities for new employment and housing sites;
 - Dudley Port – supporting the delivery of new housing and employment floorspace;
 - Coneygre, Tipton – delivering new employment opportunities through new industrial/ logistics floorspace.



Employment and skills

4.23 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. The partnership has recently worked alongside WMCA on the shaping of the investment plan for UKSPF specifically for the People and Skills and Communities and Place pillars. Workshops have also taken place to assess the Employment Support offers in local areas, identifying gaps in order to feed into the devolution deal asks.

NEET reduction

4.24 Connexions is working with WMCA and Colleges West Midlands to develop and oversee the roll out of a pan-regional strategy to reduce NEET in West Midlands. The purpose is to target a reduction in NEET of an average of 10% across the West Midlands between July 2021 and July 2022. Responsibilities of those in the NEET strategy group is to work collaboratively with key partners to drive the high-level strategy for NEET reduction and to gather knowledge and learn from impactful NEET strategies in other regions. The meeting is not always well attended by all Local Authorities but Sandwell always ensures to have a presence.

4.25 There is also a NEET Intervention Partnership aligned to the Black Country region to understand, evaluate and foster more effective collaborative working between colleges, Local Authorities, careers and schools and feed insights into a pan-regional model. The WMCA Careers lead also attends this group.

Adult Education Budget 2022-2025 Strategy

4.26 WMCA has recently issued its Adult Education Budget 2022-2025 Strategy. It sets out their vision for a responsive and flexible adult skills offer which will support a people-centred approach to ensure that the skills needs of businesses are met and that everybody can benefit from economic growth.



4.27 WMCA key priorities are:

1. Getting residents into employment
2. Upskilling and reskilling to respond to the regional economy and net zero
3. Providing a good basic education up to Level 2 for those who need it and increasing higher-level provision in all local authority areas to ensure a good balanced offer is in place
4. Supporting our communities to be stronger and benefit from inclusive growth
5. Ensuring there is a strong Community Learning offer in place, which addresses digital inclusion, family learning, sustainability and health & wellbeing.

4.26 WMCA intends to continue to collaborate closely with local stakeholders, including DWP and Local Authorities to work towards a place-based approach for local communities. They will continue to collaborate with Colleges West Midlands, the West Midlands Provider Network and ACLA to deliver the Adult Education Budget. WMCA strengthen their employer and sector body collaboration to ensure provision will increasingly be aligned to economic and employer needs.

Net Zero

4.27 WMCA are progressing several schemes to address retrofitting of homes and improving green spaces that Sandwell will be able to benefit from and the council continues to work with WMCA to identify sources of funding.

4.28 Sandwell's application to the Net Zero Neighbourhood Programme was unsuccessful, but as a result of the initial funding from the WMCA we now have a well scoped proposal for Tipton Green. Despite not receiving the full funding, WMCA continue to work with us to develop the project and have outlined that there will be further opportunities to apply for funding in the future.

4.29 A Community Green Grants scheme was launched to support small community groups with grants to develop existing green spaces and tree planting to improve the natural environment. The Council continues to promote this scheme locally with community groups. These grants also complement our own Climate Change grants for community groups in



Sandwell, and both sources of funding will allow for a range of green projects to take place in the Borough.

Wednesbury to Dudley (Phase 1) (Brierley Hill- Phase 2) Metro Extension

4.30 The 11km extension will branch off the current West Midlands Metro line just east of the Wednesbury Great Western Street Metro stop, before heading through Tipton and Dudley on its way to Brierley Hill. The extension will be delivered in two phases with the first to Dudley town centre expected to open for passenger services in 2024. The second phase will see the route further extended to Brierley Hill at the earliest opportunity. This phased approach is due to a combination of factors including a rise in construction and energy costs, at the same time as a reduction in the farebox income as a result of the Covid pandemic. This is the largest transport investment in the Black Country with a scheme value of circa £450m.

4.31 There are plans for up to 14 trams stops along the route:

- Phase one will see up to nine new stops from Wednesbury to Flood Street, Dudley
- Phase two will include the addition of five stops between Flood Street and Brierley Hill, with provision for one additional stop

4.32 Investigations are taking place as to whether sections of the route can be operated using batteries rather than traditional overhead wires. An additional Metro depot will be needed to accommodate the extended fleet of trams that will run services on all of the planned extensions.

4.33 The headline benefits of this route are...

- Attracting investment and regeneration to Sandwell and Dudley, and in phase two, Brierley Hill
- An important driver for this route is the creation of a link from this part of the Black Country to HS2 and everywhere in-between supporting economic growth by linking jobs and people
- The Wednesbury to Brierley Hill Extension will enhance public transport accessibility across the Black Country as a whole and reduce journey times as well as improve air quality and reduce noise



- 4.34 Main construction for the first phase of the scheme to Dudley town centre got underway along one side of Castle Hill in March 2020. Since then, much activity has taken place, including utility upgrades and diversions, removal of the existing road surface, creation of concrete track beds, installation of ducting for system integration and a total of 350 metres of rail laid. The team is currently replicating this activity on the opposite side of the street together with preparatory work on Flood Street.
- 4.35 Meanwhile, a number of aged railway bridges along the route were replaced in 2021 to make way for new purpose-built structures which are fit for a modern tramway. Further bridge replacement works will also take place in Sandwell later in 2022.
- 4.36 The metro extension from Wednesbury through Tipton also represents a 'growth corridor' for Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council and is the geography upon which our recent expression of interest for a Investment Zone is based.

West Bromwich Town Centre Regeneration and Bull Street MSCP Demolition

- 4.37 Following completion of the MSCP demolition in 2021, the outline business case was finalised in January 2022. This outlined potential future delivery options across the site and will be used to attract investment and steer design. This business case has been supported by senior officers within both SMBC and WMCA.
- 4.38 Design work to improve the site hoardings has been agreed with the WMCA and is underway. This work is expected to be complete early October 2022.
- 4.39 Future delivery options are being explored by officers independently but also as part of a wider development opportunity as part of the Retail Diversification Programme for which SMBC successfully secured funding in 2022 through the Towns Fund.

Friar Park Housing Development



- 4.40 SMBC and WMCA are jointly preparing a Masterplan for Friar Park. This will outline the vision for the area and will help to provide confidence to investors and developers. It is anticipated that a period of public consultation will occur late 2022 and, subject to approval, will be ratified in early 2023. Key stakeholders will also be invited to provide early engagement with the process.
- 4.41 SMBC and WMCA will consider how to take the site forward taking into account the outcome of the public consultation and the strategic needs of the Borough. Viability will be an ongoing challenge due to the level of remediation required.

One Public Estate

- 4.42 One Public Estate (OPE) is a national programme, started in 2013 delivered by the Cabinet office and the LGA, now administered by WMCA.
- 4.43 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.
- 4.44 SMBC has been successful with an OPE bid. The total Sandwell bid is £150,000 of which the Council contribution would be £30,000. The first part of the commission, a heritage assessment for West Bromwich Town Hall is now complete. The Council is about to commission the second element of the OPE funded work, which is a planning framework for Carters Green, linking to the approved West Bromwich High street Master Plan.
- 4.45 The proposal centres around West Bromwich Town Hall and Central Library, as we can demonstrate strategic links to the West Bromwich Town Fund proposals, our own transforming local services programme and the collaborative working plans with the NHS. We are exploring further small scale OPE funding which would support a ICT upgrade at the Town hall allowing the whole public sector to access desk space at the Town hall.



4.46 Joint working with the NHS is progressing well. The NHS have now moved into the third floor of Sandwell Council House . Discussions are taking place between the council and NHS about further sharing of space.

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 2022/23 is £0.611 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

