

West Midlands Combined Authority: Statement of Intent Summary

How the West Midlands Combined Authority will work?

The West Midlands Combined Authority vision will require a high degree of collaboration between its constituent Councils and the three LEAs. But the collaboration does not stop there. In the private sector, key business leaders and employer organisations, such as the Chambers of Commerce, have a vital role to play. In the public sector, the police and health commissioners and providers of every kind are going to be vital to the delivery of our vision. The university sector, further education colleges and the third sector will also play a significant role. We are committed to finding the most appropriate means of involving all our stakeholders and progress with our proposals as we begin the delivery of our vision for the West Midlands and the establishment of the Combined Authority in April 2016.

The role of the West Midlands Combined Authority

A Combined Authority is the administrative form by which Local Authorities can act together to deliver their economic and transport objectives and coordinate the functions that deliver them. By working in this way, members focus on shared strategic priorities that are best addressed at a scale above local boundaries. Examples are transport and skills. People cross Council boundaries every day as they travel to and from work, education and their homes. It makes sense for local authorities to collaborate in these areas in such a way that opportunities for people to work, to learn, to enjoy their leisure time and to access public services are maximised. That in turn helps places to be more efficient, more prosperous, and more effective in delivering what people need.

So a Combined Authority is an important mechanism which enables cities and regions in England to both achieve the scale needed to compete internationally and to remove the boundaries to joined-up government and policy making.

Combined Authorities and the existing local councils

Combined Authorities do not take power away from local councillors or the individual communities they serve. On the contrary, the existing local authorities remain in place and collectively form the Combined Authority with their partners. They remain “sovereign” and the principle of subsidiarity, whereby decisions are made at the spatial level closest to the people ‘on the ground’, applies. The regions that have already established Combined Authorities have already shown themselves to be in a better position to negotiate with government the devolution of power and resources from the national to the local level. The membership, the powers and the mode of operation of a Combined Authority are decisions for existing Councils to take.

Economic Priority:

- The emerging West Midlands Combined Authority is based on an extensive Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) assessment, which tested whether the geographic area covered by the three LEAs would be more beneficial financially than the LEAs continuing to

work separately. As a result of this, the emerging WMCA plans on using the geography to jointly create an economy which is the strongest outside London and contributes fully to the Government's vision of a wider "Midlands Engine for Growth".

- The West Midlands region is renowned for its innovation – its businesses account for almost 10% of UK research and development (R&D) expenditure, much of which is delivered in partnership with local universities. It has some of the best performing educational institutions in the country and it has particular strengths in digital technology and computer science, healthcare, business administration, engineering and technology, and education. The region also has a range of internationally recognised research institutions. This is why the West Midlands Combined Authority has ambitious plans to build on these strong foundations.
- If the region grows at the same rate as the London economy then the West Midlands will be £26.4 million better off by 2030.

Skills Priority:

- The West Midlands suffers from a significant shortage of skills both at the lower and higher ends of the skills spectrum. The skills deficit is reflected in the high levels of unemployment (9.3%) across the seven Metropolitan Authorities. This is why skills is one of the West Midlands Combined Authority's key priorities.

Transport Priority:

- We need a fully integrated rail and rapid transit network that connects our main centres with quick and frequent services, and that increases the number of people who can readily access HS2 stations and main centres. By delivering this, we will reduce transport's impact on our environment, improving air quality, reducing carbon emissions and improving road safety. The resulting network will enable the efficient movement of goods to help businesses to connect to supply chains, key markets and strategic gateways.

Housing Priority:

- The West Midlands has a large and ever-increasing population, which needs to be accommodated for in the future. This is why housing is one of the West Midlands Combined Authority's key priorities. The WMCA will therefore establish a Land Commission to help identify the land which can be used or regenerated to create homes for the future.