

Report to Council

18 March 2025

Subject:	West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) Update
Director:	Chief Executive, Laura Shoaf CBE
Contact Officer:	Member Relationship Officer, James Hughes James.Hughes@WMCA.org.uk

1. Recommendations

(1) That Council notes the information within this report.

2. Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1. As a Constituent Member of the West Midlands Combined Authority, we are committed to being a good regional partner to Sandwell Council.
- 2.2. Council approved an arrangement back in 2011 whereby members nominated pursuant to Section 41 of the Local Government Act 1985 answer questions on the discharge of the functions of any joint authority or any joint board of which the Council is a constituent authority.

3. How does this deliver objectives of the Council Plan?

Growing Up in Sandwell	The WMCA and TfWM exist to build a better connected, more prosperous, fairer, greener and healthier West Midlands. Sandwell Council is producing a Place Based Strategy which will inform the investment decisions we make over the coming years in line with the outcomes that we agree with HM Government.
Living in Sandwell	
Thriving Economy in Sandwell	
Healthy in Sandwell	Sandwell Council is a key partner in supporting us to deliver locally and regionally.
One Council One Team	We work with a range of Sandwell Officers and Members, and aim to be a good regional partner to Sandwell.

4. Context and Key Issues

Integrated Settlement

The organisation will see the Integrated Settlement launch in April, which marks a wholesale change in the way in which the region is funded. Details of the West Midlands' Integrated Settlement for FY25/26 were published on gov.uk on 30 January 2025. Our assessment is that the IS meets the principle of 'no detriment' – we will not be financially worse off inside the IS than we would be outside it.

The WMCA Board is due to consider 'Functional Strategies' which outlines the outcomes for the Integrated Settlement for 2025 –and our approach to delivering them. Functional Strategies build on existing strategies and programmes and focus on how Integrated Settlement funding will be used to deliver them. All five Functional Strategies have been developed by the WMCA and reviewed by the respective local authority officer groups. The five strategies are:

- Local Transport
- Adult Skills & Employment
- Housing & Regeneration
- Buildings' Retrofit
- Local Growth & Place

The first year (2025/2026) will mainly be used as a transition year with a one-year funding allocation focused on outputs. The first Integrated Settlement replaces 21 individual grants from 7 departments into a single annual payment, worth £389 million to the West Midlands. This will see the authority largely continue business-as-usual programmes, with some limited opportunities for the Place Based Strategies that Local Authorities have been developing. The multi-year integrated settlement will allow us to learn the lessons from the first year, as above. It will see a two-year funding allocation and a genuine move to focusing on outcomes and a wider scope for Place Based Strategies.

Budget

The latest forecast indicates an anticipated surplus of around £4.5m for the 2024/25 financial year. The proposed budget for 2025/26 is balanced but only through use of around £88m of one-off Network Stability Grant – exceptional funding provided for transport which comes to an end on 31 March 2026 – and an approved 3% increase in the Transport Levy, cash flat Member Fees and Zero Precept.

WMCA will embark on a transformation programme which will create a stronger, more dynamic organisation that supports its people to lead change, builds lasting partnerships, and improves outcomes for the West Midlands. The programme will also be instrumental in identifying some cashable savings to meet the efficiency target. The programme will focus on 4 key areas:

- How we work (Systems Change): Simplifying systems and embedding agile processes so we can focus on what really matters.
- How we operate (Organisational Design): Ensuring our organisational structure supports smarter ways of working, efficiency and a focus on regional impact.
- Being a better partner (Partnerships): Strengthening relationships externally with our Local Authorities, partners, and broader stakeholders to unlock collaboration and deliver shared success.
- Empowering our people (Culture): Developing a culture where colleagues are supported, engaged, and empowered.

Reporting to Scrutiny

As part of our commitment to being a good regional partner the WMCA continues to engage with Sandwell Council's scrutiny function. To date visits that have occurred are:

- WMCA Corporate Update – 12th September 2024 –
- WMCA Annual Scrutiny Report – 6th November 2024 –
- TfWM/Sandwell Stakeholder Meeting- 4 February 2025 -
- TfWM Bus Reform Consultation – 13th February 2025

There is a further visit planned on 20th March detailing the delivery of programmes and projects within the Sandwell MBC boundary. This report sets out, in detail, our delivery for this financial year across all four Mayoral priority areas.

Mayoral Appointments

Taskforces

Richard Parker, Mayor of the West Midlands, has appointed more than 50 experts from the region's housing, transport, economic and skills sectors to help him transform thousands of lives for the better. The 56 experts will make up four dedicated taskforces, to help guide policy and actions that tackle some of the region's biggest challenges and deliver the Mayor's key priorities – Growth for Everyone – Jobs for Everyone – Homes for Everyone and Journeys for Everyone. The role of the taskforces is to provide expert advice, challenge current approaches, and propose innovative solutions to deliver real, lasting change in line with the Mayor's priorities. Members include experts from business, education, healthcare, community organisations, and beyond. Together, they will work to shape strategies, lead projects. You can find out more information [here](#).

Commissioners

The Mayor, has made two major appointments to deliver on his pledges to improve road safety and boost cycling and walking across the region. These are the first commissioners appointed by the Mayor and will advise on road safety and active travel – the collective term for cycling and walking – working with the Mayor's new Transport Taskforce.

Road Safety Commissioner Mat MacDonald is an NHS doctor with experience supporting victims of road collisions and is previous chair of the Better Streets for Birmingham group. He is the UK's first road safety commissioner.

Beccy Marston has been appointed as Active Travel Commissioner, bringing her 17 years of experience working with communities, councils, charities and private sector organisations on initiatives to encourage more people to cycle and walk.

They will work closely with Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), which is part of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and partners, including the police, fire service and local councils, to deliver for the people of the region.

Bus Reform

Following the WMCA Board's decision in December to accept the outcome of the independent audit of the Full Franchising Assessment and progress to consultation, from 6th January to 30th March, you can have your say on how the West Midlands bus network is operated.

During this time the team have been working hard to engage with Members to equip them with the information they need to respond to, and encourage residents to, respond to the consultation. Further to this the team have also been carrying out public drop in events, employed peer-to-peer researchers and a variety of other tactics to make the consultation as open and accessible to all as possible. You can find out all you need to know regarding the consultation by visiting www.tfwm.org.uk/consultations/bus-reform/.

5. Alternative Options

5.1. No other options are considered due to this report being an update only.

6. Implications

Resources:	All advice on implications should be provided by Sandwell MBC Officers.
Legal and Governance:	
Risk:	
Equality:	
Health and Wellbeing:	
Social Value:	
Climate Change:	
Corporate Parenting:	

7. Appendices

7.1. Strategic Operations Report, January 2025.

7.2. Transport Portfolio Capital Dashboard, October 2024. [an updated version of this is current being developed]

8. Background Papers

8.1. None used.