

Vision for a West Midlands Mayor

Election 4th May 2017

This document sets out the priorities and measures that we believe a West Midlands Combined Authority Mayor should deliver on in order to empower businesses and enable our region's economy to reach its full potential.

Combined, our Chambers of Commerce represent over 5000 members and have championed the needs of businesses for over 200 years. Today, our expert staff continue to help businesses form new connections, offer support and guidance and seek to help shape the region into being the best possible place to start, move and grow a business.

We believe that the creation of a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and West Midlands Mayor can offer a step change through greater collaboration, new approaches, joined up strategy and high profile promotion and lobbying.

In this document we set out some of the key priorities and actions we believe will have the greatest positive impact on the business community. Some fall within the current scope of mayoral powers, others will require the Mayor to use their "soft powers" to influence others or seek further devolution deals. It is an executive summary. The full document can be found on our respective websites.

This document has been developed in close consultation with our members through surveys and engagement with our Chamber Councils.



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Introduction

On the 4th May 2017 voters across Birmingham, Walsall, Sandwell, Dudley, Coventry, Solihull and Wolverhampton will head to the polls to elect the region's first Mayor. The Mayor will chair the newly formed West Midlands Combined Authority and hold specific powers over strategy, budget setting and transport.

More details about the West Midlands Combined Authority can be found on a briefing paper on the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, Black Country Chamber of Commerce and Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce websites, along with the full version of this document.

According to a poll of over 500 Greater Birmingham, Black Country and Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber members undertaken in November 2016:



49% of local businesses were not aware that the WMCA Mayoral election will take place on the 4th May

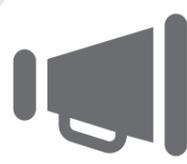


59% Businesses do not feel well informed about the WMCA and West Midlands Mayor

Businesses agree that a WMCA Mayor should:



88% Demand a fair share of funding for the region from the UK Government.



85% Promote the region on a national and international stage to Government, investors and visitors.



78% Prioritise improving transport connectivity across the region.



78% Prioritise closing gaps between the needs of businesses and the skills available in the labour market.

Providing Vision, Leadership and Promotion

The business community need a West Midlands Mayor who:

- Has the gravitas and presence to act as an ambassador for the region on a national and international stage and play a leading role in securing inward and foreign direct investment.
- Can communicate a clear vision for the West Midlands Combined Authority, its future development and devolution deals.
- Has the ability to successfully engage with and lobby National Government.
- Will work collaboratively with partners across the region; acting as a convenor, driver and catalyst for uniting stakeholders across the sectors and political spectrum on tackling the key issues of the day.

Our recommendations for the successful candidate are:

1. Launch a simple communications strategy articulating what the WMCA is and how it, and its powers, differ from or align with Local Authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and the Midlands Engine.
2. Produce a clear roadmap for the WMCA including proposed further devolution deals and how they would benefit the region.
3. Support the production and delivery of national and international investor and visitor strategies, aligning with existing local and pan-regional activity.
4. Develop, evidence and articulate the case for increased Government funding for the region.

Making the West Midlands the Best Possible Place to Do Business

The business community need a West Midlands Mayor who:

- Will work towards making the region a globally recognised and competitive place to do business.
- Understands the value of the contribution that businesses make to the economy and communities above and beyond simple taxation revenue.

Our recommendations for the successful candidate are:

1. Deliver a comprehensive Economic Strategy (including any proposed usage of a business rate supplement) approved by the business community.
2. Build on best practice from existing initiatives (such as Enterprise Zones and Chambers of Commerce) rather than purely seeking entirely new approaches.



Developing World-Class Transport Infrastructure

The business community need a West Midlands Mayor who:

- Will support and enable strategic investment in the region's road, rail and air networks, improving our local transport infrastructure.
- Will champion the opportunities presented by major infrastructure investments, such as growth at Birmingham Airport and the arrival of HS2.
- Will work with infrastructure stakeholders to secure additional investment in the region.

Our recommendations for the successful candidate are:

1. Explore innovative new approaches to tackling congestion in our major urban centres and commuter routes, effectively engaging the business community throughout the process.
2. Support work aimed at connecting the Urban Traffic Management Control Centres across the WMCA patch, enabling them to share intelligence in real time and develop a proactive approach to traffic management.
3. Back growth of Birmingham Airport locally and with Government.
4. Derive maximum value from the development of HS2, particularly in championing supply chain opportunities, improved connections for those without an HS2 station in their area and securing support for HS2 phase 2.

Ensuring a Skills Ecosystem Fit for the Future

The business community need a West Midlands Mayor who:

- Will work with businesses to understand where the skills gaps in our local labour market are.
- Will work with stakeholders, businesses and providers to set a clear, regional strategy for improving skills, improving graduate retention and reducing unemployment.

Our recommendations for the successful candidate are:

1. Work with the Midlands Engine, Local Enterprise Partnerships, business and regional skills stakeholders on designing and delivering on a united, clear skills vision, tailored to the needs of businesses in the region.
2. Foster a revolution in careers advice and guidance by supporting and enabling work connecting employers and educators, giving young people real experience of work before leaving education
3. Work with regional stakeholders to address the high levels of unemployment and inactivity within the region, especially in areas where there has been generational worklessness.

Fostering a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit

The business community need a West Midlands Mayor who:

- Will tackle the region's housing crisis and employment land shortage.
- Help champion and grow the region's high quality cultural, sporting and entertainment offering.

Our recommendations for the successful candidate are:

1. Deliver a regional spatial plan aimed at meeting the acute need for both housing and employment land and developments.
2. Champion proposals for speeding up the planning process, reducing costs for businesses.
3. Champion and enable the creation of a regional digital and energy strategy.
4. Review how the WMCA can best support and facilitate the developments of the region's strong arts and cultural scene.
5. Back the WMCA city bids for key cultural and sporting events such as Coventry City of Culture 2021 and Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2026.

Leading the region through Brexit

The business community need a West Midlands Mayor who:

- Understands the structure and strengths of the region's business and research communities.
- Will stand up for the region and its citizens in the most contentious and challenging negotiation of a generation.

Our recommendations for the successful candidate are:

1. Lobby Government for additional funding for the region, replacing that which will be lost when the UK leaves the EU.
2. Lobby Government for tariff exemptions and the creation of favourable investment conditions for the anchor institutions and industries that fuel our region's growth.

Conclusion

In the run up to the election the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, Black Country Chamber of Commerce and Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce will be working hard on behalf of our members to:

- Lobby the candidates, promoting the priorities set out in this document.
- Raise awareness of the election, who the candidates are and what their priorities are.
- Create opportunities for members to engage with the candidates.
- Encourage members to engage their employees and colleagues in registering and turning out to vote.

More information can be found on our respective websites and via the contact details overleaf.



About the Chambers

About the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce

The Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce (GBCC) is here to connect, support and grow local businesses. Accredited by the British Chambers, we have acted as the voice of local businesses since 1813.

W: www.greaterbirminghamchambers.com

E: policy@birmingham-chamber.com

T: @grbhamchambers

About the Black Country Chamber of Commerce

Black Country Chamber of Commerce is a membership organisation that provides support to businesses throughout Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Black Country Chamber provides help, advice and a range of services.

W: www.blackcountrychamber.co.uk

E: website@blackcountrychamber.co.uk

T: @BCCCMembers

About the Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

The Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce is a business membership organisation with five branches across the region - Rugby, Coventry, Mid, North and South Warwickshire.

W: www.cw-chamber.co.uk

E: info@cw-chamber.co.uk

T: @CWCC