Levelling-up the West Midlands

Our roadmap to community recovery and prospectus for government

November 2020

**Rethink
Rebuild
Recharge**

Introduction

This 'roadmap' addresses head on the issues that are causing great concern to communities across the West Midlands as we deal with the on-going coronavirus crisis. It sets out our shared hopes for the future and it calls upon government to match our ambitions with their support. It has been produced by the regional Recovery Co-ordination Group which was formed in June 2020 to address the wider social and community issues concerning the pandemic and to look forward to recovery. At the time of writing, 'recovery' still feels some way away, but unless we have a roadmap to address the key priorities emerging from pandemic response, it will be all the more difficult to achieve. There is much to do right now to level-up our region and build the foundations for future prosperity.

This is a roadmap which captures the richness of the local response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It highlights the experiences and practices that citizens, the social economy, public services and local businesses want to learn from, as well as what should be strengthened and built upon as we emerge from the pandemic.

This is a roadmap that will be led by local authorities and their local partners. They have led the response to date, and they are best placed to lead the kinds of activity that will build back better. But to do this they need more sustainable support. for future prosperity.

Government must lay solid foundations for real recovery through providing sustainable and fair funding for local government and unlocking a "double devolution" and "whole system" approach to level up the nation.

This roadmap focuses on the WMCA area as the economic centre of the wider West Midlands, though many of the opportunities to collaborate and asks of Government will benefit our broader region. It is a roadmap that offers multiple pathways for multiple partners not a single trajectory to success.

Strong relationships, joined-up place leadership and collaborative practice have been fundamental to the response so far. This has occurred at all levels, in all of the places of the West Midlands. If there has been a golden thread in reflections from local partners at this time, it has been that this way of working – built on trust, shared adversity, and commitment to people and places – is something to continue beyond the crisis. In time, we must refocus this energy on the root causes of poor outcomes and building resilience against future crises.

Facing this crisis has taken an immediate reaction to safeguard lives and businesses, and a 'meanwhile' reaction to sustain that safeguarding. The shift from 'meanwhile' to recovery will occur at some stage in the coming months: being ready for that moment means planning for recovery before our citizens are living it.

We have made space for citizens of the West Midlands to shape our recovery because they are the experts. In summer 2020, the West Midlands Recovery Coordination Group convened a Citizens Panel, comprised of people from across the region, to ensure that recovery was aligned to their fears, hopes and experiences. The structure and content of our roadmap reflects their words, priorities and principles – and it is their expectation that their voices, influence and lived experiences will be part of the on-going recovery process.

Six citizen priorities:

1. Living safely with coronavirus
2. Accessing healthcare and improving physical health
3. Mental health support and awareness
4. Education and young people
5. Jobs and training
6. Local businesses and high streets

Experiences of the pandemic have not been uniform, and it has been crucial to focus on people who have borne the heaviest burdens. Partners from across public services and the social economy have been working to understand which population groups have experienced the most serious consequences from the pandemic, reflecting on their own practice and next steps throughout. Their analysis – set out in the recent Health of the Region report – suggests that the main risk factors and inequalities included socioeconomic deprivation, ethnicity, occupation and prevalence of excess weight and diabetes. It is vital that these wider determinants of poor health are taken into account if we are to become a more resilient region in the future.

We have made asks of Government as to how they can support community recovery. Around £3bn of these asks were set out in the WMCA Recharge the West Midlands prospectus for transport, affordable housing and skills programmes and these are repeated here. **A further £203m is requested for programmes of work directly associated with community recovery on issues like digital inclusion, radical health prevention and access to green spaces.** We also need further devolved power. All of the asks in this prospectus have been previously made in our Comprehensive Spending Review and Devolution White Paper.

But Community Recovery will not depend on government funding alone. The success of our roadmap to community recovery will depend upon the region's shared commitment to working together to deliver on the wide range of community recovery ambitions set out here. We have much good practice to build upon and we have also identified a small number of areas where the potential for future regional collaboration is great.

This roadmap is endorsed by the following:

- **Andy Street** - Mayor for the West Midlands **(Chair)**
- **Cllr Ian Ward** - Leader of Birmingham City Council, WMCA Transport Portfolio Lead Member and Chair of the Met Leaders Group **(Vice Chair)**
- **Cllr Bob Sleigh** – Deputy Mayor and WMCA Finance Portfolio Lead
- **Cllr Mike Bird** - Leader of Walsall MBC and WMCA Housing and Land Portfolio Lead Member
- **Cllr Ian Brookfield** - Leader of City of Wolverhampton Council and WMCA Economy and Innovation Portfolio Lead Member
- **Cllr Ian Courts** - Leader of Solihull MBC and WMCA Environment, Energy and HS2 Portfolio Lead Member
- **Cllr Maria Crompton** – Leader of Sandwell MBC and WMCA PSR and Social Economy Lead Member
- **Cllr George Duggins** - Leader of Coventry City Council and WMCA Skills & Productivity Portfolio Lead Member
- **Cllr Patrick Harley** - Leader of Dudley MBC and WMCA Culture & Digital Portfolio Lead Member
- **Cllr Brigid Jones** - Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council and WMCA Inclusive Communities Portfolio Lead Member
- **Cllr Izzi Seccombe** - Leader of Warwickshire County Council and WMCA Well Being Portfolio Lead Member, and WMCA Non-Constituent Council representative.
- **David Jamieson** – Police and Crime Commissioner
- **Cllr Matt Dormer** - Leader of Redditch Borough Council and Chair of the WMCA Non-Constituent Council Leaders Group
- **Cllr Greg Brackenridge** – Chair of West Midlands Fire Authority

Summary

Our Roadmap to Recovery

Working collectively across the region, even as the crisis continues to unfold, we must address the immediate issues facing communities to protect lives and livelihoods and build confidence and hope that that we will build back better.

Our case to government

As we rise to these challenges as a region, we call upon government to support and amplify our efforts with new investment and wider powers to level-up the West Midlands and secure the foundations for strong and sustained productivity.

Our six community recovery priorities have been identified by communities themselves and are being driven by our local authorities and their partners.

Living safely with coronavirus

Until a vaccine is widely available, we must minimise the spread of the virus and keep people safe and well.

Ambitions:

- Permanent shift to place-based public-private-voluntary sector collaboration to support the most vulnerable
- Responsible citizens supported by clear communication and successful local testing and tracing
- Well-resourced support to address domestic violence, loneliness and mental ill health

Asks of government:

- Voluntary & Community Sector Community Recovery Fund (**£11m**)
- Review of the Localism Act 2011 and its regulations**
- A new approach to support for vulnerable women**
- Uphold new public health duty to prevent violence**

Accessing healthcare and improving physical health

In the West Midlands there are significant health inequalities that have been exacerbated by the coronavirus. It is vital that recovery ensures that these are reduced so that our population is more resilient to future pandemics.

Ambitions:

- Closer monitoring of systemic discrimination and better BAME workplace representation
- A Health in all Policies approach to decision-making across the region
- Radical rethink to create more integrated and accessible primary care services
- Putting people at the heart of decision-making and the co-design of our health and care services

Asks of government:

- Support for the Radical Health Prevention Fund (**£11.3m**)
- Develop Digital Diagnostic Screening Hubs in high footfall locations (**£13m**)

Mental health support and awareness

The pandemic has worsened mental health inequalities, and it is essential that people receive the right level of support to combat barriers to improving their wellbeing moving forward.

Ambitions:

- More accessible and joined-up mental health services, especially in more deprived and remote communities.
- To ensure that each citizen, organisation and business has the space they need to embed positive wellbeing choices into the substance of daily life.
- To tackle the root causes of mental ill health, not least the levels of inequality in the region.

Asks of goverment:

- Extension of the Thrive-Into-Work programme across the region (**£15m**)
- To become the first WHO Trauma-Informed Region (**£3.5m**)

Education and young people

There has been huge disruption to education for children and young people, leading to disparity in the level of education that they have received. Young people's employment opportunities have also been diminished due to the economic climate.

Ambitions:

- Closing the attainment gap through intensive catch-up support and better provision for home-based learning.
- Children at risk of under attainment are identified and offered good quality, accessible early years provision.
- Successful pilot for the national cross-government programme for the introduction of Youth Partnerships.
- Provision of apprenticeship wage subsidies as well as traineeships, work-related experience and additional tuition for young people whose learning has been disrupted by COVID.

Asks of government:

- Support young people into and throughout training opportunities (**£272m**)*
- Creation of a WM Safe Centre to provide care for children (**£39.6m**)
- Increase Youth Justice Powers to create a single integrated service for vulnerable young people**

Jobs and training

The pandemic has led to a rise in unemployment across the region, causing economic uncertainty and financial constraints on many families.

Ambitions:

- Integrated and personalised employment support system with a focus on those who are most vulnerable.
- A world-class regional skills infrastructure, enhancing further and higher education estates and knowledge-transfer relationships.

Asks of government:

- A wide range of investments in job creation are outlined in the WMCA Recharging the West Midlands prospectus.
- Upskill our workforce for jobs for the future and improve FE facilities (**£245m**)*
- Getting people back to work through retraining (**£33m**)*
- Co-commissioning employment support with DWP and Job Centre Plus**

Local businesses and high streets

High streets and local businesses have been hard hit by the reduction in footfall and mandatory closures during the lockdown. Recovery needs to improve their resilience as they are at the heart of local communities.

Ambitions:

- Support for small businesses at the heart their communities.
- Reimagined town centres and vibrant city centres with coordinated public services which unlock new possibilities in supporting communities.
- A region where everyone can participate in and benefit from grassroots culture and sport.
- Doubling the size of the social economy in the next 10 years.

Asks of government:

- An SME Recovery Programme (**£90m**)*
- A Strategic Business Leadership Programme (**£92 million**)*
- West Midlands Town Centres Fund (**£100m**)*
- Culture & Placemaking Investment Programme (**£80m**)*
- A devolved, long term and flexible UK Shared Prosperity Fund to replace EU structural funding**
- Creating a single disposal regime for all public sector land and property assets in the region**
- Fast tracking the creation of local delivery vehicles and development corporations for major regeneration and housing projects**

* Also included in WMCA Recharging the West Midlands prospectus
** Included as part of the WMCA submission to the Devolution White Paper

Summary

Cross-cutting principles and issues

The Citizens' Panel identified 4 principles to drive our approach to community recovery.

- Extra help to the most affected
- Environmental focus
- Innovation and creativity
- Transparency and citizen voice

Building on these we have identified 8 further issues for collective action

Extra help to the most affected

Homelessness and affordable housing

COVID-19 economic uncertainty will likely lead to more people losing work, building up arrears, and potentially losing their home. This will add pressure for households on low incomes and place greater strain on services providing support to vulnerable households.

Ambition: To sustain the gains made through 'Everyone In' by designing-out homelessness across the region through move-on support and providing people with a settled home.

Ask of government: An expansion of the Housing First Pilot, recovery tenancy pilot to prevent evictions for households in rent arrears, and support for the introduction of an LHA+ pilot (**£13.7m**)

Digital inclusion

COVID-19 has highlighted the 'digital divide', with the factors underpinning digital exclusion often the same as those underpinning social exclusion overall. As society shifts more towards online systems, the inequality gap will widen, with many households becoming more excluded and isolated.

Ambition: To ensure that every household in the region has affordable devices and connectivity as well as the support and confidence necessary to access services online and with safety.

Ask of government: To be a pathfinder region for the Good Things Foundation Great Digital Catch Up programme (**£8m**)

Debt advice

The pressures of the pandemic have pushed many people into hardship. Recent research from Citizens Advice estimates that 6 million UK adults have fallen behind on at least one household bill during the pandemic.

Ambition: To make sure that everybody in the region has good access to advice, advocacy and support to prevent debts having knock-on consequences for health and well-being.

Ask of government: (See previous asks re VCS Community Recovery Fund and Housing First)

Criminal justice

The criminal justice system is at a tipping point, with a backlog in arrests and court cases worsened by the pandemic and prisons and probation services operating at full capacity. Confidence in the criminal justice system is critical at times of economic downturn.

Ambition: A robust, locally responsive criminal justice system which supports, diverts and effectively manages offenders, those at risk of offending and those affected by crime.

Ask of government: Greater devolution of policy to local leaders and a new duty to ensure the provision of good early help.

Environmental focus

Transport

Ensuring the mobility of key workers and providing resilience for our urban areas was highlighted during the pandemic. Maintaining and improving good accessibility levels in public transport and active travel for our most vulnerable citizens will be vital in our roadmap to recovery.

Ambition: To create safe and attractive conditions for cycling and walking, whilst reassuring customers our public transport network is safe.

Asks of government: **£1.5bn** capital over the next five years for transport, as part of a single pot for infrastructure funding. Enhanced local responsibility and powers for the development, management and operation of our transport system and enforcing moving traffic offences and pavement parking.

Access to green spaces

During and following the COVID-19 lockdown, government guidance has promoted outdoor activity and the enjoyment of our green spaces. However, the pandemic has highlighted that there is inequality of access to green spaces within society.

Ambition: To ensure that everybody in the West Midlands can access good quality green space within a 10 minute walk from their home.

Asks of government: To work with the region on plans to widen access to natural capital, including through the West Midlands National Park, and achieve biodiversity net gain (**£97.2m**)

Innovation and creativity

The Citizens' Panel were clear that the roadmap to recovery is a great opportunity for the West Midlands to be creative in its thinking about the future and not to continue doing things that weren't working before.

Ambition: Through our opportunities for future collaboration, we continue to adopt an outward-looking approach, drawing upon international expertise and tailoring it to the unique people and places of the West Midlands.

Transparency and citizen voice

The Citizens' Panel told us: "Listen to the voices of people in the community, particularly key workers and those most affected by coronavirus, so that you remain people focussed." The advantages of carefully considered and well-designed community engagement are obvious but very often they take time, effort and resource.

Ambition: Communities are placed at the heart of the community recovery process and are closely involved with policy-makers and practitioners in identifying and implementing new ways of working to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Good practice map

These examples give a flavour of the wide-ranging and pioneering responses that have characterised the way in which people all over the West Midlands have pulled together to address the coronavirus crisis. Some of these are featured in the following pages but there are many, many more. Many of them hold lessons which will inform our recovery and enable us to build back better. All need to be celebrated and encouraged.

Wolverhampton: City Learning Quarter

Walsall Together: Jointly focusing on the boroughs most vulnerable and in need.

Stratford DC: Holistic approach to getting young people back into work

SSE: Support for the Social Enterprise Sector to continue operations

WM Police, Coventry, Warwickshire & North Warwickshire: Employment support during Lockdown

Wolverhampton Hope Community in Health Town (Community Project)

Walsall, Sandwell and Wolverhampton: Financial support, relief or grant funding for small businesses during the pandemic.

Mobilisation of the Community, Faith & VCSE to collaborate with Councils to support communities during Covid

Wolverhampton Base 25

Locality: Mobilisation of Community Organisations, supporting their delivery in a Covid environment

Wolverhampton & DWP Wolves @ Work Scheme

Black Country Women's Aid: Provided ongoing and enhanced support during lockdown

Birmingham Neighbourhood Network Schemes

West Midlands Fire Service: Flexible Service Delivery for vulnerable individuals during the pandemic

Wolverhampton: Wolves Workbox Digital Hub detailing employment opportunities for residents and businesses.

Birmingham: Prevention First approach to Adult Social Care

Sandwell Test and Trace with multiple language options

Herefordshire: whole system management approach to Covid outbreak

Birmingham Mind Helpline

Dudley: Black Country Impact Programme for NEETs

Holy Trinity Church, Sandwell: Mobilising the Faithful Friends network in response to the pandemic

Birmingham and Solihull Health information Exchange

Coventry CC & Severn Trent Water Partnership for Cheaper Bills for Care Leavers

Dudley MBC & CoLab Dudley made changes to public spaces to encourage social distancing in places with heavy footfall

Solihull on the Move

Birmingham 'Everyone In' to house rough sleepers

Welcome to Coventry Web App

Solihull: Development of a Mental health Awareness Plan

Solihull: Delivery of ESF funded employment support to NEETs

Wolverhampton

Walsall

Sandwell

Dudley

Birmingham

Solihull

Coventry

Priority 1:
Living Safely With Coronavirus

What the Citizens Panel said:

"Keep the virus under control and reduce the impact, so that people can live without current fear and get normality back into daily life. This means making sure that everyone understands the rules and follows them and are held accountable."

Until a vaccine is widely available, ensuring that we can live safely with COVID-19 is understandably a high priority for people across the West Midlands. This is reflected in local discourse, which has focused on helping people to do the right thing. Directors of Public Health have risen to prominence in local and national media, providing calm leadership and regular insights so that people, places and organisations can balance their desires to live, work, worship, and socialise, alongside stopping the spread of the virus. The highest risk settings – schools, nurseries, universities and domiciliary care – were quickly identified, with local authority and regional public health working together to try to minimise the risks through good practice, advice, and access to protective equipment. This was particularly challenging in care homes, where the spread of COVID-19 was severe, exacerbated by pressure on hospitals.

1. Support for the most vulnerable

Ever since the pandemic began, the response to support the most vulnerable showed the region at its best. The leadership from our public institutions has been matched at the grassroots: new mutual aid networks working alongside established faith, neighbourhood and community groups to do everything from food and medicine distribution to befriending. Both have gone with the grain of local strengths and assets and have used their diversity to ensure that no-one is left out. This has shifted the relationships between public services, local businesses and the social economy, as collaborative, people and place-focused working has become more commonplace.

Our ambition

Cross-sector collaboration is something that all local partners would like to retain and strengthen, during the remainder of the pandemic and into the future. We need to keep the focus on going the extra mile to support those people who have too often been overlooked.

There are more examples of great practice as part of the emergency response to the pandemic in the WMCA Health of the Region 2020 report available on the WMCA website.

Great practice: Hope Community in Heath Town, Wolverhampton

Based in the heart of the Heath Town estate in Wolverhampton, Hope Community was first off the blocks in delivering emergency food parcels to the estate's vulnerable residents. As local support systems were established, Hope Community diversified its support. For example, once the delivery of the emergency food parcels started, Hope Community started a complimentary service called 'Lockdown Lunches' – a cooked meal, delivered once a week by volunteers, who could check in on the people they delivered to.

Great practice: Welcome to Coventry web app

Over the pandemic, the Welcome to Coventry web app1 has been used to collate essential information for anyone with limited English language skills. The information is updated daily, and includes what to do if you have symptoms, how to shield vulnerable people, employment rights, and where to find mental health support.

Users can choose from a menu of several languages, instantly translating the site into the chosen language, available in both text and audio.

2. Test, trace and compliance

In the early days of the pandemic, the clear guidance ("stay home"), matched with enhancements to Universal Credit and 'furlough', and a strong sense of shared adversity and mutual responsibility, helped the country to control the virus. But this has been hard to sustain as loosening restrictions and changing rules have left more room for well-intentioned errors. Efforts to communicate effectively with all sections of the community have shown some success and local test and trace has been effective, but these efforts have been under-resourced relative to the national service.

Our ambition

Individual responsibility borne by our citizens to abide by COVID-19 guidance and regulations must be matched by clear, regular and accessible communication from public authorities, and the necessary resources to ensure that doing the right thing is safe and affordable and our local testing and tracing programmes are trusted and effective.

Great practice: test and trace in Sandwell

In July 2020, Sandwell Council established its own test and trace system. The Director of Public Health, Dr Lisa McNally, was concerned that the contacts missed by the national programme were feeding the spread of the virus. Feedback suggested that some areas were being served poorly because of insufficient translation services, and crucial workplace data was missing.

Sandwell's public health team – which was already engaging with faith groups on a regular basis – reached out to people within the Council who could speak the community languages required, enabling them to reach people that the national scheme was missing.

International great practice: Taiwan

Learning from its experience with SARS in 2003, Taiwan was proactive in responding to COVID-19. Its approach was common – test, trace and isolate – but its speedy, joined-up response, use of big data, and sustained citizen buy-in, have been exceptional.

Taiwan made it easy for its citizens to access free and rapid testing, with temperature checks and masks a compulsory part of entering any public or commercial building. There are also fines for breaking regulations. Big data enabled both track and trace, as well as sourcing masks.

3. Domestic violence

Living safely with the virus goes beyond the risk of catching and spreading it. One of the hallmarks of lockdown was a rise in domestic violence – an international trend that the West Midlands was no exception to. Rising homelessness will make it even harder for women and children to leave their abusers: refuges are full, because many parts of the region lack the homes for them to move into when they are ready to start a new life.

Our ambition

The risks of the virus and risks of other harms need to be balanced – whether it is domestic violence, loneliness, or mental ill health – those organisations dedicated to addressing these immediate and growing problems must be resourced and supported to do their vital work.

Our asks of government:

- **Voluntary & Community Sector Community Recovery Fund (11m)**– in line with the recent Kruger Report, Levelling Up Communities, this fund will build the resilience of the VCS to continue to support the most vulnerable.

- **Review of Localism Act** - to empower Local Authorities to build the foundations for stronger and more sustainable services, and enable stronger collaboration with community groups and social enterprises.

- **Support for vulnerable women** - Local authorities, WMCA and the PCC will work with government to develop a whole system approach for vulnerable women to include women's centres, liaison and diversion, out of court disposals, problem solving courts and custody.

- **Uphold new public health duty to prevent violence** - to ensure accountability through collaboration and partnership working led by the Violence Reduction Unit.

Opportunities for future collaboration:

- Building neighbourhood assets and collaborating with communities.

- Communicating with communities and public health and other issues.
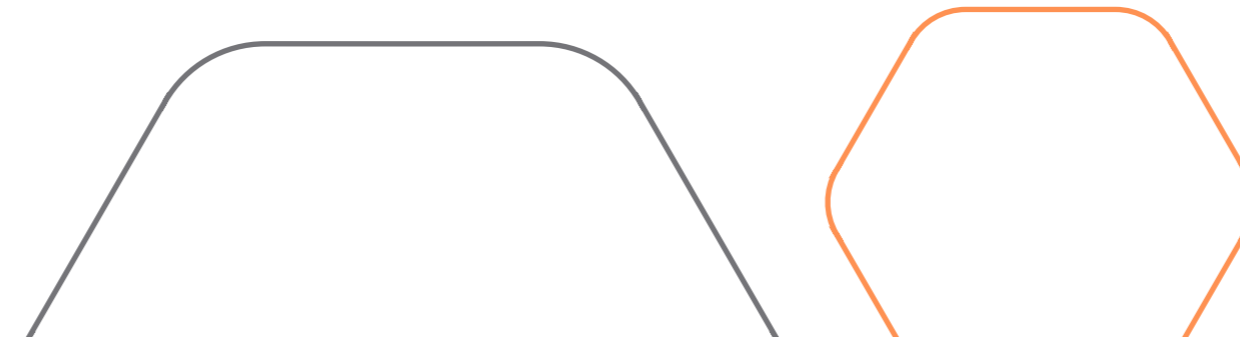
Priority 2: Accessing healthcare and improving physical health

What the Citizens Panel said:

"Use face-to-face appointments only when necessary (and remote appointments where possible) to make sure that patients can be treated at Covid-free clinics and the healthcare system gets back on track to diagnose and treat people when they need it. It also means promoting healthy living to reduce demand for the NHS in the long-term."

Even prior to the pandemic, there were entrenched and persisting health inequalities in our region. In line with national findings, the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing health inequalities. The WMCA has a higher rate of cases overall than the region as a whole, with Birmingham and Sandwell most affected; rates are also high in Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The highest rates of COVID-19 related deaths are in more deprived areas, and areas with a greater proportion of residents from BAME communities. Lockdown and social distancing measures have had direct impacts on wellbeing and on health behaviours too.

In order to address the immediate and emerging health impacts of COVID-19 and take steps towards a happier and healthier population, more resilient to future pandemics, we need to adopt a 'radical prevention' approach. Radical prevention means taking action as a whole system to tackle the underlying causes of poor health and health inequalities (the 'causes of the causes') and shifting to more person and community-centred approaches to health and wellbeing.

1. Improving outcomes for people from ethnic minorities

As we have grown to understand more about COVID-19 as a country, it has become clear that some people have borne a heavier burden of harm than others. Public Health England has identified a number of reasons why case and death rates have been significantly higher amongst Black and Asian ethnic groups. Specifically, people from Black and Bangladeshi ethnic backgrounds in particular are more likely: to suffer from other chronic conditions; to work in occupations with higher risk to COVID-19 exposure; to use public transport to travel to their places of work; to live in housing conditions which exacerbate transmission and mortality; and to experience systemic, percussive discrimination and racism which directly affects physical and mental health, and has been shown to affect access to health services.

Our ambition

It is already incumbent on all public institutions to monitor and evaluate the extent to which systemic discrimination affects their services and working practices, but more can be done. Notably, people from BAME groups need to be better represented at all levels in their workplaces, and NHS and other health and care bodies should commit to relevant race equality standards alongside more rigorous data collection, research and analysis on BAME health outcomes.

2. Tackling the wider determinants of poor health

In order that we might be more resilient to future pandemics, we need to make sure we create a society in which everybody can lead a healthy lifestyle. This means looking not just at the causes of ill health, but the causes of the causes: getting a good start in life, educational attainment, our jobs and incomes, our homes and where we live, our friendships and sense of purpose and belonging. These wider determinants of health have been shown to be the main drivers of health inequalities which in turn have led to some communities being more badly affected by COVID-19 than others.

Our ambition

In responding to and recovering from the pandemic, the health and wider system must put a strong focus on the root causes of poor health. One way to achieve this is through a Health in All Policies (HIAP) approach. HIAP encourages every public agency to consider the health implications of every decision it takes to find opportunities to promote wellbeing, avoid causing harm, and reduce inequality between groups. We are also committed to becoming a 'Marmot city region' to galvanise our shared commitment to preventative health and well-being and build a more collaborative system for achieving it.

3. Widening access to health and cares services

The crisis has put in sharp focus the inequalities in healthcare provision caused by disparities in access to good quality healthcare, especially for poorly managed conditions in vulnerable groups. As the NHS seeks to deal with a significant backlog of non-COVID-19 related morbidity, it is likely that the effect of this will serve to widen existing health inequalities. Take cancer as an example: across the UK it was estimated that by August 2020, 2.1 million people have missed out on screening, while a further 290,000 people with suspected symptoms have not been referred for hospital tests. Other concerns include access to mental health services; the future of care homes and domiciliary care; and the implications of moving towards a system that relies more heavily on telehealth.

Our ambition

Community recovery presents the opportunity for a radical rethink of the ways in which people access health and care services. Primary care services could be much better integrated within local neighbourhoods with clinics, pharmacies, housing officers, voluntary and community groups working together as we have seen in the crisis – particularly focusing on those who most need support and access. The opportunities created by the switch to virtual consultations to ramp up efficient, patient-centred digital screening services are there to be made, but only if we also focus on those people who don't have digital devices or connectivity, or the confidence and skills to make the most of telehealth services. Importantly, we need a new vision for adult social care, addressing the crisis facing the care home sector and finding new ways to support people to live at home, connected to their wider community.

4. People-powered health

COVID-19 pandemic has made everyone consider their own health and wellbeing and lockdown has reminded many people of the benefits of daily exercise, and of the improvements to mental health that can result from spending regular time with nature.

People-powered health is an approach to wellbeing that puts people and prevention first. This could be as simple as encouraging people to walk or cycle more through safer streets and active travel schemes, or to socialise outdoors. It encompasses initiatives to tackle childhood obesity, build public awareness about healthy eating and tackle food poverty in poorer neighbourhoods.

Our ambition

People-powered health involves putting people at the heart of decision-making and the co-design of our health and care services. From healthy eating to social prescribing initiatives, we must encourage and support healthy lifestyles in every corner of the region. As we look forward to the Commonwealth Games, we must make sure there is a legacy around sport and physical activity that is experienced by every community.

Great practice: Solihull on the Move

Solihull on the Move is a borough-wide campaign which aims to increase physical activity and create healthier, stronger and more sustainable communities. The activity framework takes a whole life approach, focusing on:

- Sustaining activity from childhood through adolescence and beyond;
- Inactive people;
- People with a disability or long term health condition; and
- People on low incomes.

– for example, developing a supported version of the 'Couch to 5k' – as well as distributing small grants to community organisations.

SOLIHULL ON THE MOVE

Great practice: Birmingham's Neighbourhood Network Schemes

Birmingham's Neighbourhood Network Schemes (NNS) are an innovative approach to working with older people to access community activities through a person-centred, community-based approach to care, and through better co-ordination between social work teams, NNS workers, community groups and local residents. NNS lead organisations in each area hold a local commissioning budget which enables them to identify gaps, and encourage local organisations to receive investment to deliver specific projects within their local areas. During the COVID-19 lockdown period, work was undertaken with the Birmingham Children's Partnership to develop this network into an all age NNS, ensuring that people of all ages can benefit from support that goes with the grain of their local assets.

Our asks of government:

The Radical Health Prevention Fund (**£11.3m**) will provide grants and repayable grants for innovation and scale-up in place-based initiatives to tackle the root causes of ill health such as housing, obesity, mental health and employment, including the use of 5G and other digital technologies promoting digital inclusion, and a social prescribing for walking and cycling scheme. This investment will:

- 25 innovation grants per year over 3 years;
- 8 scale-up grants and loans per year over 3 years;
- At least one quarter of all investment going to BAME organisations or projects that involve a significant level of BAME co-design;
- At least one third of programme beneficiaries will be from BAME backgrounds.

Developing Digital Diagnostic Screening Hubs (**£13m**) in high footfall venues will address concerns about missed screening appointments that will enable citizens to access speedy diagnostic interventions and treatment in places other than health care settings. This investment will:

- Reduce the NHS waiting time for Cancer Screening in the West Midlands by 10%;
- Reduce inequalities in access to screening by increasing options for attendance.

Opportunities for future collaboration:

In the recently published Health of the Region 2020 report, the WMCA and its partners made over 50 commitments to tackling the health inequalities that hold the region back. This includes, for the first time, the multi-agency regional Midlands 'STaR Board' which brings together health, public, private and voluntary sector partners from across the region to develop more collaborative approaches, standards and frameworks to tackle these issues head on.

Priority 3:
Mental Health Support and Awareness

What the Citizens Panel said:

"Make sure that anyone who needs mental health support knows where to find it and is guided to access support. There needs to be an extra focus on recognising the signs of mental illness in society. We should address the vulnerability of recently unemployed people, young people and the elderly. Teachers and employers should therefore also be trained to spot issues and offer support."

There is no doubt that the people of the West Midlands have increasingly suffered with mental ill-health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The West Midlands Health of the Region report observes that inequalities in mental health have widened during this time, both because of the virus itself and the impact of the measures taken by society to tackle it.

The mental health crisis as experienced by local people has been multifaceted: borne of loneliness, bereavement, educational and economic worries, and of the trauma faced by many key workers in frontline roles where social distancing is impossible. Many frontline workers are often in low income occupations and feel overlooked or taken for granted, this is serious – both in its own right, and because poor mental health often sits at the root of life-limiting behaviours, poor physical health, and poor economic outcomes. It is a particular issue for people from black and ethnic minority communities, who face more barriers to treatment and tend to have a poorer experience of mental health services.

1. Making it easier to access mental health support

Data from online mental health support services shows an increase in requests for support nationally compared to the same period in 2019, for children, young people and adults.

In areas that were most affected by COVID-19, there was a sharp increase in children and young people seeking support for bereavement and loss of family contact. In the wider West Midlands, support requests for children and young people increased for eating issues, education worries and suicidal thoughts. Among adults, the health of others was a key concern, as well as the pressures of changing work cultures and environments, and increases in loneliness, sadness and depression.

Our ambition

To ensure that mental health services and support are joined up and accessible, including remotely and in localities.

Great practice: Birmingham Mind helpline

Birmingham Mind had to work quickly to translate its face-to-face service offer, which it did by extending the hours of its existing helpline. This has since been enhanced through partnership with Birmingham & Solihull Clinical Commissioning Group (BSol CCG), which was keen to develop a 24-hour service that could help citizens and frontline workers.

While the provider of support varies, the access point remains the same, regardless of who calls and when – ensuring ease of access.

2. Widening awareness of mental health support

Whether it is access to green space, time with friends, or headspace, people have grown to understand the extent to which the lives that they live contribute to their mental health. Thrive into Work is a great example of how the public sector can create the conditions for employers to build good mental health and wellbeing into life at work. However, in a time when many businesses are only barely staying afloat, and people in general struggling to balance increased demands with less social support, it is much harder for that sort of positive practice to be sustained.

WMCA currently offers the Thrive at Work toolkit to businesses across the region and is actively recruiting new businesses. To support this WMCA is working with delivery partners across the region to amplify the current mental health awareness programmes. Encouraging community members to sign up to the free NHS Every Mind Matters toolkit and create an individual mental health wellness plan. We are encouraging Businesses to sign up to This is Me, the free mental health stigma reduction campaign and we are also encouraging individuals to sign up and become a Mental Health First Aider to provide support to our work colleagues, friends, family or community members.

Our ambition

To ensure that each citizen, organisation and business has the space they need to embed positive wellbeing choices into the substance of daily life.

International great practice:
Kia Kaha, Kia Maia, Kia Ora Aotearoa

New Zealand has developed a psychosocial and mental wellbeing recovery plan to help people manage, adapt and respond to the distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Maori title for the plan translates as "through strength and endurance our wellbeing will prevail," recognising that many influences on health and wellbeing sit beyond health services.

The support element spans a wide range of interventions: from providing clear information, basic needs and community connection, through to delivering specialist mental health and addiction services.

New Zealand Government / MINISTRY OF HEALTH

COVID-19

Kia Kaha, Kia Māia, Kia Ora Aotearoa:
Psychosocial and Mental Wellbeing Recovery Plan

As at 15 May 2020

3. The unequal burden of mental ill health

Inequalities in mental health have widened as a result of the pandemic, but they were not created by the pandemic.

In February 2020, The Marmot Review noted that the resilience and mental wellbeing of children and young people was a significant cause for concern, and noted deteriorations and widening socioeconomic inequalities in mental wellbeing. As unemployment rises and incomes drop, there is concern that these inequalities in mental health will widen further. It follows that people who have already impacted the most by the pandemic – in loss, stress, and loss of stability – will bear the greatest burden of mental ill health.

Our asks of government:

- **Thrive into Work extension (15m)** - an extension of the DWP / DHSC Work and Health Unit funded pilot to deliver high quality employment support to people with health issues or disabilities in the West Midlands. This will enable the programme to be delivered region-wide and disseminate learning to multiple organisations.

- **WHO Trauma-informed region (3.5m)** - to create the world's first WHO recognised trauma informed region which will empower and enable communities, civil society, public services and private enterprise to adopt an inclusive approach trauma and adversities. This work will be overseen by a collaborative partnership board including the Violence Reduction Unit and build on existing partnerships in the region.

Our ambition

To tackle the root causes of mental ill health through a relentless focus on the causes of inequality and a much greater focus on early intervention and prevention, particularly amongst children and young people and those with multiple and complex needs.

Opportunities for future collaboration:

- Reconvening the Mental Health Commission and developing the wellbeing at work agenda

- Develop consistent, trauma-informed practice across the region
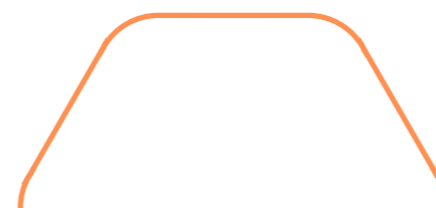
Priority 4:
Education and young people

What the Citizens Panel said:

"Prepare children to go back to an adapted school environment, ensuring their safety and wellbeing. Make sure that every child is supported to make up for lost time so children from all backgrounds are equally able to achieve their goals."

Well performing schools, colleges, early years provision and access to good jobs are critical to the 972,423 under 18 years olds and 404,906 18-24 years olds in the West Midlands Combined Authority. They are also vital to the economy, safety and wellbeing of a place. Good provision rooted in communities increases house prices, lowers crime and antisocial behaviour and it is intrinsically linked to raising aspirations. Before the pandemic, we were making good progress, with the number of young people not in employment, education or training falling, and the number of apprenticeship starts increasing faster than the national average.

The recent summer term exposed existing inequalities: only 4% of vulnerable children attended school alongside children of key workers, access to and the quality of online learning varied and free school meal provision remains a hot topic. The absence rate at schools in the first half term of the academic year of 2019/20 (last year) averaged under 5% across the WMCA area, the indicative figure for the same period of 2020/21 was over 11%. The immediate and ongoing priority of schools, colleges and early years provision of staying open is followed by the welfare and mental health of children and staff, and the pressure that both will be under as the pandemic continues, students catch up, and exams and Ofsted are rethought. Closing the attainment gap can only be achieved by provision remaining open, to ensure that disadvantage is not locked in for the most vulnerable children.

Adolescents have had a much tougher time through lockdown. Many of the usual outlets for both physical and emotional development and support have not been available or have changed significantly. Those who have been expecting to take exams have experienced significant disruption and anxiety and many continue to do so as the future remains unclear. Our young people who are exiting formal training or education know that entering the labour market will be very different for them compared with those in the years before them. Young people report a need for an acknowledgement of their experiences and tangible options for them to heal and refocus on their future.

1. Closing the attainment gap that has widened during lockdown

Ensuring good quality, inclusive provision remains open and focuses on improving the life chances of all children, with particular attention on the most vulnerable pupils (including the development of bespoke personal education plans in line with children in care).

a. Local solutions based on school catchment areas could include: volunteers listening to reading; 1-1 tutoring; work experience for years 10-11; local industry / Chamber of Commerce input etc.

b. Digital access and support: improving the home working with access to laptops, broadband, bespoke educational programmes for both pupils and parents and carers encouraging a love of learning and ability to achieve homework set by the school.

c. Evidence based alternative education for those that don't seem to be developing well within a classroom environment on school sites so re-integration takes place.

2. Renewed focus on early years and school readiness

Good quality, accessible, early years provision is valuable for social, emotional, language and physical development; and critical for social mobility providing a key opportunity before children start school to close the inequalities gap. The lack of access to early years provision during lockdown, and the reduced offer which has since emerged, risks widening the attainment gap and the number of children who are ready for school at age 5. Covid has resulted in many early years providers closing and under 5 year olds spending much more time at home. For many that experience has been positive, though for some, those with additional needs, vulnerability or whose parents could not provide learning or enrichment activities, or because of their own challenging lives, the inequalities risk widening significantly. The role of early years providers having 'eyes' on those children to safeguard, provide stability and offer a route to additional support is profound, but right now, many have dropped off the radar. We must urgently identify those children and bring them into good quality early years provision.

Our ambition

Children in our region are provided with good quality and timely interventions and support from early years when children are prepared for school through to young people leaving year 12 prepared for work and the wider world. Whatever their background, environment, culture and circumstances, they must be given the very best chance to maximise their potential as positive members of society.

Our ambition

Children who are at risk of under attainment are identified and brought into good quality, accessible early years provision. Parents and carers have confidence and trust in our high quality, inclusive, early years provision built on positive relationships that helped them prepare their children to embrace learning and wanting them to be the best they can possibly be. Early years provision is well funded, professionally led and consistently good quality.

3. Youth 'offer' including intergenerational activities

The West Midlands is home to a young and ethnically diverse population, but at a time when they were needed most, many youth work projects stopped or became severely restricted. We have seen a decline in young people's mental health; the loss of wrap around targeted services; access to sexual health clinics, walk in clinics and youth centres; an absence of relational based practice offering good quality advice on personal relationships, safety, personal fitness and nutrition; summer holiday activities cancelled or scaled back. One in five youth clubs and services are predicted to not re-open. The pandemic has compounded inequalities that already existed and has hit vulnerable and marginalised children and young people the hardest, many of whom are in the already tricky stage of adolescence. A comprehensive and broad youth offer must be developed which empowers and upskills communities to meet the immediate needs of young people during the pandemic, such as mental health and wellbeing as well as the ongoing needs to support young people back into education, training and work.

Our ambition

The West Midlands is a pilot for the national cross-government agreement for the introduction of Youth Partnerships, in partnership with the National Youth Agency to measure its impact and build on the good practice. This will bring full time Youth Workers based in school catchment areas supporting targeted youth support to deliver a wide range of activities. In addition we will build on our employment and skills regional Information, Advice and Guidance website for young people, parents and carers, other professionals. All of this designed, implemented and reviewed with young people at every level.

4. Supporting young people with training and getting into jobs

Employment rates for young people aged 16-24 have plummeted. Young people are more likely to be employed in the 'shut down' sectors and, when they do fall out of work and education, 75% are likely to remain disengaged for the long term. In the West Midlands the NEET rate is already higher than the national average, and is likely to rise further during this crisis. There is a risk that without urgent intervention, young people and new graduates are at risk of entering the labour market during a severe downturn, exposing them to the risk of unemployment and longer term scarring effects.

Our ambition

We will ask government for the funding to provide apprenticeship wage subsidies and providing traineeships and work-related experience. We must also provide training opportunities in higher level 3-5 courses for young people who might otherwise be unemployed, enhance tracking schemes and provide additional tuition for young people whose learning has been disrupted by COVID.

Great practice: REACT

The Regional Schools Commissioner's REACT group established new relationships with local authorities and schools providing support and challenge and a direct, swift route to Government to make swift decisions based on local intelligence. The locality based multi-agency group led themed weekly deep dives, for example into vulnerable children, transport to school and early years providers, sharing best practice across localities and regions and identifying issues and solutions early on.

Our asks of government:

Supporting young people through jobs and training

- **£167m** to redeploy existing Education and Skills Funding Agency (EFSA) and apprenticeship levy funding to provide apprenticeship wage subsidies and providing traineeships and work-related experience

- **£105m** funding over three years to widen the guarantee for level 3 funding for 19 year olds to provide training opportunities in higher level 3-5 courses for young people who might otherwise be unemployed, enhance tracking schemes and provide additional tuition for young people whose learning has been disrupted by COVID.

WM Safe Centre (£39.6m) – we want to build a new 'safe centre' facility, purpose built for safe and secure care for children. It will be used for court-ordered care and custody, with the aim of short-term respite to grow stability and self-esteem. The Centre will be supported by a whole-system care solution, to ensure that vulnerable children – who currently experience dire outcomes – are not left behind.

Youth Justice powers – local authorities, the combined authority and the Police and Crime Commissioner wan to work with government to establish the devolution of youth justice powers to put in place a single, integrated service for vulnerable young people, youth custody and a framework for safeguarding older children.

Great practice: Base 25

Wolverhampton charity Base 25 quickly moved 80% of its face to face service online during lockdown. However, a significant minority were unable to access online appointments safely. As such, those appointments were conducted outdoors, socially distanced – Base 25 concluding that it needed to focus on what it could do to support their young people, rather than what it couldn't. Being outside ultimately worked really well for those young people: it was good for their health and wellbeing, and good relationships with neighbourhood police were developed, who helped them reach more young people who needed their support.

Opportunities for future collaboration:

- Collaborative work on early years

- Developing a consistent offer to care leavers

- Establish a future generation commission to develop and improve innovation in outcomes for children
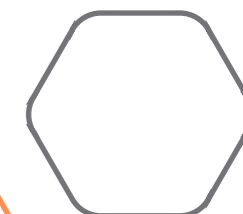
Priority 5:
Jobs and Training

What the Citizens Panel said:

"Create new jobs, with an emphasis on apprenticeships and entry-level jobs. Make sure that additional training is provided to give people the right skillset to enter the workforce. Get people who have lost their jobs for Covid related reasons back into work."

Before the pandemic, the employment rate in the West Midlands was growing faster than the national average and wages were rising at the same rate at the UK average. We had a rapidly growing number of active businesses and the number of people with higher level qualifications was growing faster than the national average too. But by June 2020, 210,000 people in the West Midlands were claiming unemployment benefits - double where we were in June 2019. Young people in particular are more likely to lose their jobs and less likely to be hired as the economy recovers. West Midlands Women's Voice have also highlighted that "women still do the majority of unpaid care, and early data shows that mothers in opposite-sex couples were 50% more likely to have been fired, quit or furloughed than fathers during lockdown". Getting people back into work has been a key priority for the region's Economic Impact Group and is at the heart of the 'Recharging the West Midlands' submission to Government. As indicated by the Citizens Panel, it has also been a consistent priority for citizens – with members of the public highlighting the relationship between a healthy workforce, a safe working environment, and getting people back to work.

1. Getting the West Midlands back to work

As home to a young and ethnically diverse population, our region has been disproportionately exposed to the negative jobs impacts of the economic crisis. Without urgent intervention, young people are at risk of entering the labour market during a severe downturn, exposing them to the risk of unemployment and longer-term scarring effects. Similarly, many older workers, including those in the automotive and manufacturing sector have lost their jobs or have been furloughed. We need to support workers who are vulnerable to unemployment to return them to work quickly and track them in the labour market.

Our ambition

An integrated and personalised employment support system that works with individuals across communities and demographics, with a focus on those who are most vulnerable, to ensure they can access good work that meets their needs.

2. Future skills, future jobs

Alongside a focus on getting people back to work, we need give people the skills and training to get new jobs – either to re-enter the labour market or for young people moving into the world of work. Our Citizens Panel argued that these jobs should be future facing. Green jobs were a key focus, given the importance of reaching net zero and the regions tradition in automotive and manufacturing. Digital skills were also highlighted as particularly important, ensuring that all communities can benefit from new roles that leverage technology and digital connectivity. Our region's Further Education Colleges, Universities, and business leaders have a key role to play here, ensuring that we have the skills at all levels to match our economic ambition and boost economic recovery.

We must also support job creation, so the roles are there for skilled candidates to apply to. Our Recharging the West Midlands document outlines our plans for job creation, bringing together ambitious proposals around infrastructure and industry.

Our ambition

A world-class regional skills infrastructure, enhancing further and higher education estates and knowledge-transfer relationships, to deliver our shared ambition of world-class technical skills provision - alongside an economy that creates high quality, future-facing jobs.

Since March, WMCA has been using its existing devolved powers to secure new jobs and train young people– we have successfully completed the £5m Construction Gateway programme, se-cured a further £1.5m Government funding to scale-up the £5m Digital Retraining Fund, and con-tinued to see apprenticeship starts despite the onset of COVID-19.

Great practice:
Wolves at Work

This partnership between Wolverhampton City Council and the Department for Work and Pensions has supported over 5,000 people into work in the last three years, and is now central to tackling the COVID-19 jobs challenge. The programme offers unemployed people one to one support through a dedicated team of coaches, accessing vacancies and providing support through the interview and application process, and for a further 12 weeks when an individual enters employment. Employer Work Coaches also work with employers to ensure clients have access to vacancies before they are openly advertised.

ONWARD — UPWARD
WOLVES
— AT WORK —

International great practice:
Brussels Region Recovery and Redeployment Plan

The Government of the Brussels Region has established a Recovery and Redeployment Plan with three main short-term measures - socio-economic and employment transition; social policies; and regional and environmental development. In the first phase of the plan, €500 million was allocated in aid measures to support people and businesses affected by the crisis (with a bonus for traders, self-employed people, artists, etc.). For the second phase, the government allocated a further €120 million to support and improve the living environment of local people during summer.

Our asks of government:

A wide range of investments in job creation are outlined in the WMCA Recharging the West Midlands prospectus.

This also outlines investment in our skills system including:

- **£33m** to get people back into work through retraining

- **£245m** to upskill our workforce for jobs for the future and improve FE facilities

- Support young people with training and getting into jobs (see previous section)

We have also asked for powers and flexibilities over skills and employment support in our Devolution submission, including co-commissioning employment support with DWP and Job Centre Plus.

Opportunities for future collaboration:

- Filling employment gaps in frontline services

- Tackling structural barriers to the success of ethnic minority and female employees in the workplace
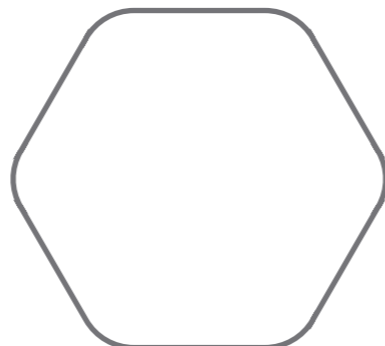
Priority 6:
Local Business and High Streets

What the Citizens Panel said:

"Promote and support business, especially smaller and/or local businesses and the self-employed (e.g. by encouraging people to buy local). Provide financial and business support to help them get back on their feet and protect jobs."

One of the positives of the Covid period highlighted by members of our Citizens Panel, and supported by surveys across the country, is the way lockdown encouraged renewed engagement with local places. For many, a core part of their community is the local businesses that they relied on during this challenging period, and the high streets and town centres that host them. Recovery needs to focus on how we support these shops, nail bars, cafes, hairdressers, and pubs. It also needs to look ahead – to how we can create places that account for the changing ways we are living our lives.

1. Backing our region's small businesses

When asked about their experience of lockdown, many Citizens Panel members highlighted local businesses. People across the region see 'buying local' as a lived manifestation of the community spirit which has brought so places together during the pandemic. Nonetheless, many small businesses have been hit hard by COVID-19, and a combination of decreasing demand, disrupted supply chains, and increasing rents means that many face closures. This will impact the most marginalised communities, who rely more heavily on local businesses for food and essentials. The social economy will be key to recovery, with many local businesses adopting or exploring co-operative or community ownership models in order to continue serving their populations.

Our ambition

Small businesses that have a key role in their communities – providing vital goods and services, creating work, and supporting thriving places and a doubling of the size of our social economy – building on the work of the Social Economy Taskforce.

The WMCA, local authorities and LEPs have also worked together through the Mayor's Economic Impact Group to ensure that business support from Government is targeted to those sectors, firms, and workers that are most in need.

2. Creating thriving high streets and town centres

The future of small and local businesses relies on thriving high streets and town centres. This must be about more than economics, recognising that Covid has prompted a fundamental restructuring of how we work, live, travel, and play. This future must also be about the environment, recognising that green spaces are air quality are crucial to supporting happy and healthy communities.

Supporting changes to how we work will require new investments in mixed-use spaces in cities, reimagining the usual office commute. How we choose to live was already changing prior to Covid, with a focus on new residential developments in town centres and a focus on green and affordable housing. How we travel is crucial to realising our net zero targets, and we can invest more in walking, cycling, and innovations in 'last mile' transport. How we play has become more important than ever, with culture and experiences promoting belonging and positive identity in our communities and serving as the anchor for the footfall that helps small businesses thrive.

Our ambition

Reimagined town centres and vibrant city centres, with coordinated public sector intervention unlocking new possibilities and supporting communities.

3. Supporting grassroots culture, art, and sport

The West Midlands has a rich cultural heritage; through Diwali, Eid, Black History Month, Vaisakhi, Chinese New Year, Hannukah and Easter to its hundreds of unique festivals each year, giving a glimpse into the richness of spirit and unique DNA of those that live here. Our places thrive when we embrace participation in culture, and the Commonwealth Games 2022 in Birmingham and Coventry City of Culture 2021 provide a unique moment to encourage mass participation at the grassroots level. Yet the organisations delivering cultural activities have been hit particularly hard by Covid and need additional support to ensure they can continue playing a role in our communities.

Our ambition

A region where everyone can participate in and benefit from grassroots culture and sport, and where the organisations, artists, and freelancers who deliver this work are given the support they need.

Great practice:
Birmingham City Council and the '20 minute neighbourhood'

The Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, has created an ambitious plan to phase out vehicles and create a "15-minute city". This concept ensures residents can reach key places such as grocery shops, parks, cafes, sports facilities, schools and workplaces within a 15-minute walk or cycle. Birmingham City Council have been exploring the '20 minute city' as part of their work on Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, and considering the changes that would be needed to make the idea a reality – including redefining libraries and schools outside of their operational hours into citizen kiosks, and transforming nightclubs into gyms in the mornings and afternoon. Central to this is to ensure places are created for people by people, emphasising the importance of a human-centric approach which is created using public participatory approaches.

Great practice:
Café Culture

Under the Business and Planning Act of 2020, temporary pavement licenses have been introduced, which allow food and drink venues to operate on the pavements outside their premises, without compromising the safety of pedestrians. Many of our local councils have worked closely with local businesses to create safe spaces for trade. Areas have been pedestrianized to continue service provision and increase the amount of places to walk in town centres. Promoting this 'Café Culture' has had a positive impact, as it has enabled local businesses to remain operational. It also presents an opportunity to consider whether these spaces can be pedestrianised permanently. While these decisions were taken out of necessity, they can inspire further moves to pedestrianisation across the region.

Great practice:
Covid secure premises

Wolverhampton City Council's 'Covid Compliant' Covid Support Advisors Scheme is providing reassurance to residents and businesses across the city that their shops are covid compliant. This offers a 'premises check' to any shop to check adherence to regulations. The venue is issued a window sticker, to demonstrate that they are a Covid safe premises. So far, over 1200 businesses have passed the scheme. This is hugely positive, as it is providing reassurance to businesses and residents.

The West Midlands Town Centre Taskforce has continued to meet and support local authorities in developing investment plans. The WMCA has also worked with Towns Fund recipients to develop their proposals and secure funding from MHCLG, whilst making sure that funds deployed through the Brownfield Investment & Acquisition Programme align with these local priorities.

Our asks of government:

The WMCA Recharging the West Midlands prospectus proposed:

- An SME Recovery Programme (**£90m**)

- A Strategic Business Leadership Programme (**£92 million**)

- West Midlands Town Centres Fund (**£100m**)

- Culture & Placemaking Investment Programme (**£80m**) to enhance the role of culture in towns and neighbourhoods, through investments in events, community schemes, and cultural infrastructure

And our Devolution submission made the case for:

- A devolved, long term and flexible UK Shared Prosperity Fund to replace EU structural funding.

- Creating a single disposal regime for all public sector land and property assets in the region

- Fast tracking the creation of local delivery vehicles and development corporations for major regeneration and housing projects

Opportunities for future collaboration:

- A research programme on the Future of Cities

- Town Centre Taskforce

- Doubling the size of the social economy

Cross-cutting principles and issues

The Citizens' Panel identified 4 principles to steer our approach to community recovery.

● Extra help to the most affected
● Environmental focus
● Innovation and creativity
● Transparency and citizen voice

Building on these we have identified 8 further issues for collective action.

1. Homelessness & affordable housing

Under 'Everyone In' close to 1000 individuals rough sleeping and at risk of rough sleeping were accommodated across the WMCA region, illustrating what can be achieved in partnership, with a shared will to support our most vulnerable citizens.

However, the broader economic impact of COVID-19 is yet to be fully understood and this economic uncertainty will lead to more people losing work, building up arrears, and potentially losing their home. This will add pressure for households on low incomes in both the social rented and private rented sectors. As eviction protections are lifted, the reasons for future homelessness will include rent arrears and wider debt accrued over the course of the pandemic. Analysis by the WMCA Homelessness Taskforce indicates that an estimated 8000 households who were not in rent arrears prior to March 2020 are now either in rent arrears or at risk of being in rent arrears in the foreseeable future. Without intervention, these households are at risk of losing their homes.

Ambition:

● To sustain the gains made through 'Everyone In' by designing-out homelessness across the region through move-on support and providing people with a settled home.

Our asks of government:

● An expansion of the Housing First Pilot, recovery tenancy pilot to prevent evictions for households in rent arrears, and support for the introduction of an LHA+ pilot (**£13.7m**)

● Affordable Housing Fund (**£400m**) move to homelessness section

● Building on the homelessness taskforce, develop a broader collaborative approach to designing out multiple and complex needs

2. Digital inclusion

COVID-19 has highlighted the 'digital divide', with the factors underpinning digital exclusion often the same as those underpinning social exclusion overall. Just under 60% of individuals from lower income groups do not have access to the internet whereas 99% of individuals within higher income groups do. The barriers by which people are excluded fall into three broad categories: accessibility and affordability of technology; lack of connectivity through mobile or broadband; or lack of digital skills and education. As society shifts more towards online systems, the inequality gap will widen, with these individuals becoming more excluded and isolated.

This affects many aspects of daily but is particularly critical in schools where many children have had extended periods of home-based learning; in healthcare where access to services has quite rapidly moved online; and in public transport where information and payment is increasingly digital first.

Ambition:

● Regional efforts to ensure everyone has access to a device, an affordable and reliable internet connection, and the confidence to operate online

Our asks of government:

● To be a pathfinder region for the Good Things Foundation Great Digital Catch Up programme (**£8m**)

3. Debt advice

The pressures of the pandemic have pushed many people into hardship. Recent research from Citizens Advice estimates that 6 million UK adults have fallen behind on at least one household bill during the pandemic, including: 3.9 million on their credit card or overdraft repayments; 2.8 million on their energy bills; 2.8 million on their Council Tax; and 1.2 million on their rent.

The same research indicates that certain groups are more likely to have fallen behind on their bills: 21% of key workers, compared to 7% of people who are not key workers; 24% of people with caring responsibilities, compared to 6% of people without caring responsibilities; 31% of Black people, compared to 12% of white people.

This is consequential for people's health, resilience, and for the wider economy: people who would otherwise be spending money on local goods and services are instead repaying interest on their debts. Different types of debt require different approaches to alleviating arrears, many of which will need to be negotiated or otherwise resourced by central Government. However, access to advice and advocacy so that people can repay debt in a way that is reasonable and affordable is a cross-cutting requirement.

4. Criminal justice

Crest Advisory describes that the Criminal Justice System (CJS) was already 'running hot' before COVID-19, with an estimated backlog in the courts of c.104,000 cases in March 2019 nationally, and prisons and probation operating at full capacity. They described COVID-19 as pouring 'rocket fuel' onto an already combustible problem. Combined with longstanding legacy issues, rising crime and the police uplift, it has left the CJS on the brink of a 'tipping point', beyond which it may cease to function in any meaningful sense. When we move out of the pandemic and cannot sustain borrowing at current rates, we will inevitably become a poorer society. Increases in crime are well evidenced as being linked to economic downturn and is then that our CJS needs investment and rigour.

Ambition:

- To make sure that everybody in the region has good access to advice, advocacy and support to prevent debts having knock-on consequences for health and well-being.

Our asks of government:

- (See previous asks re VCS Community Recovery Fund and Housing First)

Ambition:

- A robust, flexible and locally responsive criminal justice system which supports, diverts and effectively manages offenders, those at risk of offending and those affected by crime.

Our asks of Government:

- Greater devolution over justice policy to locally elected leaders

- A new statutory duty and power for locally elected leaders to monitor and oversee early help, including school exclusion practice and policy across West Midlands.

Environmental focus

5. Transport

Public transport is a vital public service, this was highlighted in the pandemic in ensuring the mobility of key workers and providing resilience for our urban areas during this crisis. Better connectivity will improve people's access to job and training opportunities, raise productivity across the region and connect people to vital services including health care and well-being services. Our more deprived communities are facing the greatest barriers to travel. With a fragile public transport market, bought about by COVID-19 and continued funding pressures for essential travel concessions, further reductions will have a disproportionate impact on those who have already been hit hardest. Ensuring good accessibility levels in public transport and active travel for our most vulnerable citizens will be vital.

Ambition:

- To create safe and attractive conditions for cycling and walking, whilst reassuring customers our public transport network is safe. A COVID-19 Transport Action Plan provides a coherent plan for new sustainable infrastructure projects, transport innovation and enhanced local powers which in turn will support the wider efforts to boost our economic recovery.

Our asks of government:

- **£1.5bn** capital over the next five years for transport, as part of a single pot for infrastructure funding. This single pot approach has a specific focus on critical enabling infrastructure such as transport (as well as building on the opportunities of HS2 and UK Central Hub area), housing, energy, natural capital and digital connectivity.

- Enhanced local responsibility and powers for the development, management and operation of our transport system; including circa **£87m** revenue to support the devolution of all Bus Services Support Grants (including BSOG and CBSSG) directly to TfWM.

- Enhanced local powers for enforcing moving traffic offences and pavement parking, including the local retention of revenue generated from transport enforcement activities; delivering double devolution.

6. Access to green spaces

During and following the COVID-19 lockdown, government guidance has promoted outdoor activity and the enjoyment of our green spaces. However, the pandemic has highlighted that there is inequality of access to green spaces within society. The West Midlands is characterised by densely populated urban areas, which lack private gardens or parks within close proximity. As a result, the pandemic has (for the most part) had a disproportionate impact on lower socio-economic groups who are unable to reach these spaces for physical or recreational activity. For example, research by the RSPB indicates that people in the UK with an annual household income under £10,000 are 3.6 times more likely to have no outdoor space where they live, and about 40% less likely to live within a 10-minute walk of any publicly accessible natural greenspace than people with a household income of £60,000 or more.

There are considerable benefits to natural capital for physical and mental health, as well as for mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA), funded by NERC, estimates the health benefits of living with a view of a green space are worth up to £300 per person per year, and that increasing green spaces could reduce run-off and urban flooding which costs around £270 million a year in England and Wales. Increasing access to high quality natural capital, in addition to associated measures around promoting active travel (cycling and walking) as part of the recovery plans, have the dual benefit of improving health and wellbeing, as well as retaining and enhancing improvements to the environment and air quality we have seen in lockdown.

Ambition:

- To ensure that everybody in the West Midlands can access good quality green space within a 10 minute walk from their home.

Our asks of government:

- To work with the region on plans to widen access to natural capital, including through the West Midlands National Park, and achieve biodiversity net gain (**£97.2m**)

- Community green grants (**£4m**)

7. Innovation and creativity

The Citizens' Panel were clear that the roadmap to recovery is a great opportunity for the West Midlands to be creative in its thinking about the future and not to continue doing things that weren't working before. They highlighted two particular concerns.

First, that the region should learn from other countries and be flexible and open-minded about new ways of working and new forms of collaboration. To support this, we have included a number of case studies from overseas within this roadmap document.

Secondly, that the recovery should be tailored to ensure that it is driven by local circumstances and shaped by what people in the West Midlands say they need. This is why this routemap has been developed through a process which has drawn upon extensive research with local authorities and their partners and features many example of local success.

8. Transparency and citizen voice

The Citizens' Panel was a deliberate initiative to ensure that citizens played a key role in determining the priorities and the approach adopted in our routemap to recovery. Having been invited to be involved – and having been empowered by their experience – the panellists made a clear plea for the future:

"Listen to the voices of people in the community, particularly key workers and those most affected by coronavirus, so that you remain people focussed."

The advantages of carefully considered and well-designed community engagement are obvious but very often they take time, effort and resource. However, in co-designing all aspects of community recovery with those people most affected, it is far more likely that interventions will be successful, outcomes achieved and scarce public resources used to the best effect.

Ambition:

- Through our opportunities for future collaboration, we continue to adopt an outward-looking approach, drawing upon international expertise and tailoring it to the unique people and places of the West Midlands.

Ambition:

- Communities are placed at the heart of the community recovery process and are closely involved with policy-makers and practitioners in identifying and implementing new ways of working to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

Rethink
Rebuild
Recharge