

Appendix:

[DRAFT] Young Combined Authority vision and priorities for the West Midlands

Culture and Major Events

While the pandemic has challenged the West Midlands, there is reason to remain optimistic; we are on the brink of a cultural revolution. World class events such as Coventry City of Culture 2021 and Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 present the opportunity to change perceptions about our region and make a mark nationally and globally. However, we must think about legacy and ensure that benefiting local people is not an afterthought, but our primary concern.

1. Involve young people throughout the development and delivery of cultural strategies and events – setting the expectation that all major cultural initiatives in the West Midlands will be significantly shaped by local young people.
2. Work in partnership to advance diversity across the cultural sector; using major events to celebrate our region's diverse communities, tracking the impact of Culture Central's 'More than a Moment' pledge and ensuring that sector support is accessible for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic artists.
3. Ensure that opportunities created by cultural programmes directly benefit people from disadvantaged groups. A key example will be ensuring that money is not a barrier to young people accessing volunteering opportunities created by Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022.
4. Develop creative solutions for enabling disadvantaged young people to access major events, including Coventry City of Culture 2021 and Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022, such as; a lottery of free tickets, subsidised travel to events, online activities and a 'Youth Anniversary Games' programme for young people to participate in.
5. Follow Greater Manchester Combined Authority in appointing a Night Time Economy Czar, to advocate for and support the recovery of the sector, which employs a large number of young people and has been significantly affected by the pandemic.

Skills

Our young and diverse population will only achieve its full potential if public and private sector organisations across the West Midlands work together to invest in training, create job opportunities and remove barriers to young people realising their ambitions. Now more than ever, we must build up a skills offer to make our region more resilient and equipped to support future generations.

1. Explore the potential for a regional scheme to better support people with disabilities to get reasonable adjustments in the workplace. The scheme should be designed by and give power to people with disabilities, as experts in their own lives.
2. Work in partnership to consider skills-based interventions for under 16's which could prevent young people from dropping out of education or becoming unemployed.

3. Encourage businesses to create and promote more high-quality apprenticeship opportunities so that more young people can go straight from school into a work or further education setting.
4. Strengthen the connections between young people and industry by encouraging businesses to develop their mentoring and work experience offers – investing early in attracting and supporting young people into work.
5. Be mindful that digital poverty has meant that many young people have lost access to youth services as they moved to online formats during the pandemic, and create a strategy to ensure young people will retain their access to skills support.

Digital

Digital underpins everything we do as a region. COVID-19 has highlighted our overwhelming reliance on technology and the inequalities experienced by those living in digital poverty, the so-called 'digital divide.' The region has a responsibility to tackle this disparity, support young people to gain access to careers within industry and thereby ensuring that we are using digital resources to build a stronger West Midlands for the future.

1. Develop a robust strategy to effectively address the digital divide highlighted by COVID-19, with a specific focus on young people to ensure equal access to education and development opportunities.
2. Extend the current digital skills strategy to include training for under-16's, to ensure that we are effectively building the workforce of the future by giving young people the right opportunities to obtain vital skills and access to careers in the digital industry.
3. Launch a regionwide public awareness campaign to ensure that people living in the West Midlands are more aware of digital based resources and increase basic digital skills.
4. Focus on developing industry partnerships and promoting investment in new and innovative technologies, with the aim to both build businesses in the region and effectively attract large companies with the view of providing more opportunities for young people.
5. Position inclusivity and accessibility at the forefront of any digital strategy, particularly when looking at digital based public service reform, to ensure that a transition to digital does not mean that those unable to access the internet are left unable to access support.

Environment

COVID-19 has shown that we cannot wait to address the problems which we may face in the future. Young people will bear the brunt of the impact of climate change. The Young Combined Authority has recognised that it may be too late to prevent irrevocable damage to our environment, but swift action must be taken to mitigate these effects.

1. Work with urgency to deliver a transition to low carbon and carbon neutral transport: securing more charging points for electric vehicles, investing in public transport and encouraging citizens to use active transport where possible.

2. Educate young people in environmental awareness by developing resources, holding virtual workshops and information evenings, and launching campaigns to highlight sustainable choices.
3. Enable young people to lead the Green Industrial Revolution from our region by working with businesses, universities and other organisations to encourage and support young people to pursue green careers.
4. Campaign and take action to tackle climate change: the YCA Board will make our own 'Count Us In' pledge, focused on walking and cycling more, and will challenge the WMCA and its partners to invest in active travel.
5. Improve the access to and quality of green spaces in low-income areas, to improve mental health for our communities and biodiversity for our places.

Transport

In the wake of Coronavirus, there must be renewed attention on how we as a region can make transport work for people. Transport networks form the basis of our society; creating access and connections between people, places and opportunities. It is therefore vital that any regional recovery plan builds a resilient network, that is sustainable and tailored to our future communities.

1. Ensure that all current concession schemes for Young, Disabled and Elderly residents of the West Midlands are maintained in the immediate future – and extend these schemes when finances allow.
2. Further engage young people in the development of transport policy - through greater participation, transparency, scrutiny and accountability on transport decisions, and formal channels such as the YCA and TfWM Youth Forum.
3. Further develop the SWIFT Card offer, to extend across all operators and support greater integration of contactless payment for passengers who may opt to use this technology.
4. Work with travel operators to deliver the rollout of free and fast WiFi on all buses, trains and Metro across the region to enable greater access to travel.
5. Champion greater community involvement and accessibility across the transport network, through funding streams and projects agreed within operator contracts (particularly on Timetables and station improvement) and embracing schemes such as Changing Places Toilets at stations, Toilets on trains and the Sunflower Lanyard for those with disabilities.

Housing and Regeneration

Our places are what make our people. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our town and cities; we must rebuild and rebuild back better. For so long, our places have not worked for the young and the most vulnerable in our society. It is our duty to take this opportunity presented by COVID-19 to deliver change - we must strive to build better.

1. Take further action to increase the proportion of affordable housing in the West Midlands – which currently stands at 7% according to the WMCA’s definition of affordability – so that young people can benefit from the 1.9 million homes due to be built in the region by 2030.
2. Ensure that rough sleeping levels do not return to those experienced before COVID-19 and take action to prevent people from falling into homelessness as a result of the economic impacts of the pandemic.
3. Work in partnership to pursue eco-friendly development, that extends beyond carbon-neutral construction to actively allocating land to create the green spaces which are central for promoting mental health, social cohesion and community ownership of place.
4. Collaborate with partners to ensure that construction training courses are tailored for and targeted at young people, to provide employment opportunities in the immediate future.
5. Allocate more brownfield land and under-utilised retail space to community hubs and low rent space for entrepreneurs, to provide young people with ample opportunities at the same time as rejuvenating our town and city centres.

Inclusive Communities and Wellbeing

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and deepened existing inequalities within the West Midlands. Supporting inclusive communities and wellbeing is essential for achieving a fair and effective recovery from the crisis. By tackling disadvantage, decision makers will begin to address historic injustice and also enable more of our citizens to contribute to recovery efforts.

1. Recognise the unequal and disruptive impact of the lockdown on education, and ensure that young people get the support they need to overcome this additional disadvantage and realise their long-term goals.
2. Work in partnership to support and resource the community organisations who deliver essential help to the most vulnerable people in our region.
3. Acknowledge that the pandemic has caused significant trauma for many communities in the West Midlands - connecting to Black Lives Matter, disrupting worship and increasing vulnerability – and ensure those affected are given the Mental Health support they need to recover.
4. Work in partnership to deliver a Youth Games programme to run alongside the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, so that young people across the region feel included and inspired by the Commonwealth Games.
5. Take action to ensure that our region’s leadership representative of the communities they serve and ensure that policy development is truly inclusive of all people in the West Midlands, spanning all forms of identity and lived experience.