
West Midlands Young Combined Authority

Annual Review 2020/21



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Foreword

The West Midlands is renowned for both its youth and its diversity. Both of these factors are deservedly celebrated when we consider our region.

However, while one in three people living in our region are aged 25 or under, the average age of a councillor in England is 59. We as young people in this region have a role to play in addressing this imbalance.

The Young Combined Authority (YCA) was set up by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Board in order to bring the voices of young people to the fore. Together, we have joined in the WMCA's discussions, debates, and decisions which affect the future of the region. The future we will live in.

This report sets out how we have worked to build this status and make this happen during the June 2020 to June 2021 year.

Throughout, we have tried to capture the YCA's activities and achievement across three key themes:

One: How we have contributed to the development of regional policy and priorities, so that these reflect the needs and ambitions of young people.

Two: How we have campaigned using the YCA platform to speak up on critical issues, and discuss with leaders and organisations across the region.

Three: How we have developed and redesigned the way in which the YCA works, to help us to make a bigger impact going forward.

Our Board has changed dramatically over the course of the last year, and as part of this, we both became the first Co-Chairs of the YCA. Working together, we realised

that we would need to focus our energy during this term on two key challenges: supporting the YCA to have a greater impact on decision making, and securing a lasting legacy for youth voice in the West Midlands.

This is the YCA's first Annual Review, and while we are looking back upon our year, we are also looking forward towards legacy. We hope that this document demonstrates the value which youth voice has had upon our regional policy making, and in doing so, encourages people in positions of power to engage with the YCA programme and its ambitions.

We hope that you will read the content of this report, and share our opinion that the YCA has experienced a year of progress, influence, and growth. We are immensely proud of the impact that the YCA has been able to collectively make.

As the summer draws to a close, so too will our time as Co-Chairs on the YCA, as we step down from our positions and from the board.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the WMCA, the Beatfrees Collective, and, most importantly, YCA members for investing their time, collective energy, and unending hope in the Young Combined Authority Project.

It has been a privilege to have been a part of the Young Combined Authority's journey over the past two years as members, and the past year as Co-Chairs. We truly look forward to seeing where it will take our region in the future.

**Aisha Masood and Chris Burden,
Co-Chairs of the YCA Board, 2020/21**

A Year of the YCA

1

Young Combined
Authority Board

16

YCA Board Members
participated

22

YCA Board
meetings held

6

Attendances at the
WMCA Board

1

YCA Vision Report
published

7

WMCA reports
influenced

2

Independent
public events

5

Campaigns

1

YCA Community
launched

Introduction

Who we are...

The Young Combined Authority (YCA) brings together a diverse group of young people, aged 16 to 25, from across the West Midlands to help guide and challenge the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) as it makes decisions which will shape the future of the region.

We were established in 2019 by the WMCA Board to:

- Provide direct insight and challenge from young people within regional policy.
- Speak up for the third of West Midlands residents who are aged under 25 years.
- Help inform decisions which will shape the future for our generation.

About this document...

We have decided to produce this review of our activity and impact during the 2020/21 municipal year (June to June) to be presented to the WMCA Board's Annual General Meeting.

It offers a narrative and highlights of our key achievements, including our involvement in shaping regional priorities, our progress in strengthening our platform and our work to develop the YCA itself.

By detailing our accomplishments in this way, we aim to:

- Outline the progress the Young Combined Authority has made in building youth voice into WMCA policy development.
- Set out our aspirations and targets for the year ahead.
- Encourage more young people to participate in regional youth voice by evidencing the difference we can make.
- Demonstrate our potential to add value, to encourage WMCA Board members to work with us and invest in youth voice.
- Recognise and capture each other's achievements so that we can reflect on our individual and collective development journeys.

Theme 1 - Shaping the Region's Priorities

The youth and diversity of our population is a huge source of potential for the West Midlands, and it is important that these voices are heard by the people making decisions about the future of the region. Throughout the year we have worked hard to make sure that the priorities of young people are prioritised by policy makers – from shaping regional conversations about how to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, to publishing our own Vision and Priorities report and contributing to WMCA policy development.

Shaping the response to Covid-19

It is no secret that young people have been disproportionately disadvantaged by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic – whether that is by the direct impact of lockdown on education and the jobs market or how the crisis has exasperated existing problems and inequalities.

As such, it is not surprising that much of our activity has focused on helping to inform the way the region works to recover from the pandemic.

In June 2020, Andy Street and Councillor Brigid Jones – the Mayor of the West Midlands and WMCA Portfolio Lead Member for Inclusive Communities respectively – joined a YCA Board meeting to discuss the impacts of Covid-19 on young people.

During the session, we shared our views, experiences, hopes and concerns for the future. We described our priorities for a 'good' recovery from the pandemic, one that: is green, boosts education and jobs, maximises on opportunities, engages young people, supports Mental Health and wellbeing and, most importantly, is fair and inclusive.

A summary of the conversation was fed directly into work to agree the region's shared priorities for recovery from Covid-19, via the Recovery Coordination Group (RCG).

The YCA have also influenced Covid-19 recovery priorities through our involvement with the Citizens Panel that informed the Community Recovery Roadmap, where we recommended that a specific quota of participants should be aged under 25 years, and through advising on and supporting a youth engagement survey about the rates of Covid-19 among young people.

YCA Vision and Priorities

In the months leading up to the first Covid-19 lockdown in March 2020, we were working with Beatfrees and Aston University to develop a 'youth manifesto' to present to candidates of the elections for Mayor of the West Midlands. Lockdown meant our work was paused, the elections were postponed, and priorities needed to be reviewed.

Building on discussions about the impact of Covid-19, we decided to focus our efforts on repurposing the draft manifesto to create a post pandemic vision document: 'Our West Midlands: YCA Vision and Priorities for the Future.'

Our report articulates the YCA's asks and aspirations of and for the West Midlands. We collectively identified seven priority areas as being particularly important for helping the region and its younger population to recover from the crisis. For each priority area we developed a vision statement and five 'asks' of the region, informed by our own discussions and engagement with WMCA directors and policy leads.

We published our YCA Vision report in February 2021, having presented it to the WMCA Board in January 2021. Since then, we have focused on sharing our report with decision makers across the region to identify ways our ambitions can be taken forward through policy, delivery and future devolution asks.

Our engagement has included sharing the Vision with candidates of the 2021 mayoral elections – to make sure that the priorities of young people are high on the region's agenda. We worked independently with Aston University to host the region's first 'Youth Hustings' (March 2021) where we gave all mayoral candidates the opportunity to share their plans for supporting our young population.

Read our Vision report at: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/media/4561/yca-vision-2021.pdf>





Impact on WMCA Board reports

In addition to the YCA Vision report, members have also informed, influenced and contributed to a number of other meetings and reports presented to the WMCA Board, including:

- **Overview & Scrutiny Committee (June 2020):** having participated in a number of meetings, Aisha contributed to the Committee's Annual Review to the WMCA Board. Aisha, Michael and Kashmire have since been invited by Councillor Lisa Trickett to join Committee meetings throughout the 2020/21 municipal year.
- **RCG Community Recovery Priorities (July 2020):** the YCA's discussion with the Mayor and Portfolio Lead Member for Inclusive Communities on the impact of Covid-19 on young people informed a report to the Recovery Coordination Group (RCG) on priorities following the pandemic.
- **Inclusive Communities Portfolio Update (Sept 2020):** the WMCA Board made direct reference to the YCA's challenge for further action on Black Lives Matter and outlined the new model for the Young Combined Authority, which we coproduced with WMCA officers.
- **Health of the Region Report (Nov 2020):** as the YCA Board, we submitted a pledge as part of the report to champion citizen voice within policy development. We also produced and read a statement in support of the report to the WMCA Board.
- **West Midlands Digital Roadmap (Jan 2021):** the report included a foreword by Kari, one of the YCA's co-leads for Digital and Skills, which emphasised the need to focus on digital inclusion and provide young people with the skills to pursue jobs in the digital sector.
- **Environment & Energy Board minutes (Jan 2021):** Councillor Ian Courts invited Lily to join the WMCA's Environment and Energy Board meeting in December 2020 to present on the YCA's developing priorities and asks for the Environment.
- **Economic Update and Next Steps (March 2021):** the YCA's Vision report influenced the region's plans and priorities for economic recovery from Covid-19, culminating in us being quoted in a report to the WMCA Board: "we must rebuild, and rebuild back better."

Theme 2 - Loudening Our Voice

We were established to speak up for the third of West Midlands residents who are aged under 25, which is why we are proud to have transformed the YCA into an independent campaigning force. Over the past year, we have spoken up on issues that matter most to our generation, helped the WMCA to connect with young people and been engaged by a number of regional bodies – from Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 to business leaders, the media and universities.

Black Lives Matter

Each of us joined the Young Combined Authority to be ambassadors for young people and hold people in power responsible for the things our communities care about. That is why we chose to speak out in the wake of George Floyd's murder and subsequent media attention on Black Lives Matter; to challenge leaders to do more to tackle inequality.

- We wrote a **statement** on Black Lives Matter, committing to use the YCA's platform to call for change. It was published on our social media and presented to the WMCA Board by Eman in June 2020.
- This was followed with a more developed **Letter on Black Lives Matter** to the Chief Executive of the WMCA. Our Letter outlined the racial inequalities experienced by many across our diverse region and called for more action to bring tangible and lasting change.
- Olivia and Eman were invited to read our Letter to the **WMCA Board in July 2020**, taking the challenge and appeal directly to the region's decision makers. The WMCA Board accepted the need for collective action to address inequality and racial discrimination across the region.
- In August 2020, we received a **written response**, thanks and commitment to action from the Mayor.
- In September 2020, Councillor Brigid Jones took the '**Inclusive Communities Portfolio Update**' report to the WMCA Board, which recognised the YCA's challenge and outlined how WMCA equalities activity will be refocused to better respond to Black Lives Matter and the inequalities highlighted by Covid-19.
- Read the Letter at: <https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/wmca-welcomes-young-people-s-call-not-to-forget-black-lives-matter>

“We continue to welcome the challenge provided by the Young Combined Authority. It is the duty of any public or private body who does not represent this makeup of this area to ask why, to ask what we can do to address that, and to ask what we can do to hear the voices that are not around this table to inform what we do.”

Councillor Brigid Jones, WMCA Portfolio Lead Member for Inclusive Communities and Deputy Leader at Birmingham City Council

“I would like to thank the Young Combined Authority for writing such a powerful and thoughtful letter and presenting it to WMCA Board today, it was important for us to hear. The YCA have highlighted the need to take action, and the WMCA looks forward to working with our young leaders to make this happen. We are prepared to be bold, prepared to feel uncomfortable and prepared to be held to account.”

Deborah Cadman, WMCA Chief Executive

“We are pleased we had the opportunity to put forward our views on standing in solidarity against racism and inequality. It is something that needs to be addressed now and for the future of the West Midlands. When you say you stand in solidarity, you actually need to do something about it.”

Eman Mowatt, Young Combined Authority



Campaigns

As a YCA Board, we have also led, delivered and supported a number of campaigns throughout the year to engage young people on key regional issues and raise awareness of our own priorities for the future.

Key campaigns include:

- **Covid-19 Youth Survey (Sept 2020):** we helped to shape and then promote a regional survey to find out more about the spike in young people testing positive for Covid-19.
- **YCA Community (Dec 2020):** we worked with the Beatfreaks team to codesign and promote a social media campaign to encourage young people across the West Midlands to sign up to join the new YCA Community.
- **Count Us In (Jan 2021):** we made a ‘Count Us In’ pledge to save 56kg of carbon entering the atmosphere every week by switching to active travel for our essential journeys. The aim is to model behaviour change while campaigning for more investment in active travel.
- **YCA Vision (Feb 2021):** we designed and delivered a media and stakeholder engagement plan to raise the YCA’s profile and promote our YCA Vision and Priorities report with people in power across the West Midlands.
- **#YourVoteMatters (April 2021):** ahead of the elections, we championed voter registration and turnout on our social media channels – supporting the WMCA ‘Our Region, Our Voice’ and Electoral Commission campaigns and highlighting the importance of youth voice for our region.
- **Other comms events:** YCA statement on Black Lives Matter (June 2020), Black Lives Matter Letter to the WMCA Board (July 2020), Response to the Government’s 10 Point Environment Plan (Nov 2020), Response to the WMCA’s Health of the Region Report (Nov 2020), and a YCA podcast for International Disability Day (Dec 2020).
- **We also advised on...** the West Midlands Recovery from Covid-19 Narrative (Sept 2020) and Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 Narrative (Feb 2021).

Speaking

YCA Board members have also spoken at a number of board meetings and events, including:

- **WMCA boards:** political boards including WMCA Board, WMCA Overview & Scrutiny Committee and WMCA Environment & Energy Board, and officer groups: WMCA Strategic Leadership Team, WMCA Policy Working Group and West Midlands Recovery Coordination Group.
- **Other regional boards:** West Midlands 5G Board and Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) Board.
- **Panellist for:** WMCA staff webinar, WMCA Mayor Faith Briefing, West Midlands Women's Voice and Midlands UK Forum for Growth.
- **Youth meetings and events:** Transport for West Midlands Youth Forum and initial meeting of youth representatives from Mayoral Combined Authorities.
- **YCA Events:** led the YCA Community Launch event and independently organised an Event for Mayoral Candidates.



Theme 3 - Developing the YCA

The Young Combined Authority celebrated its first birthday in September 2020. Throughout the summer we worked together to identify how to build on our successful start and enable the YCA to make more of a difference in the future. We decided that the way forward was to evolve into a YCA Board and launch a new YCA Community.

The YCA Board

We worked with WMCA officers and the Beatfrees team to reflect on the first 12 months of the Young Combined Authority and consider potential ways to improve how we work (the 'YCA operating model'). Our aim was to make the YCA as impactful and inclusive as possible.

To make the YCA more impactful, we decided to move away from the original model (one group of around 30 young people who met monthly) to become a smaller 'board' who work more closely with the WMCA on policy development. We adopted the YCA Board model from September 2020, aiming to build closer relationships with the WMCA Portfolio Lead Members and Directors so that we can offer more input and challenge.

Key benefits of the YCA Board model are to:

- Enable the YCA to become more **'youth led'** by establishing Co-Chair roles and Co-Leads for our chosen priorities.
- Promote **greater involvement and impact**, by meeting more frequently and more actively engaging with WMCA policy development.
- Offer **greater exposure** to political leaders, senior officers and the media – by creating a louder voice and nominating Co-Leads as points of contact for WMCA portfolio areas.
- Create more opportunities for **member development** by making it easier for individual YCA members to represent the Board at events, in meetings and on specific issues.

Highlights by Priority Area

By establishing 'Co-Chair' and 'Co-Lead' roles for our priority areas as part of the YCA Board model, we have increased our capacity for impact and made it easier for WMCA officers and Portfolio Lead Members to engage with us. This approach is starting to make a difference.

Key highlights by priority area include:

- **Culture and Major Events:** Eman and Michael have met with the Director of Legacy at Birmingham Commonwealth Games 2022 and her team around the need to ensure local people benefit from the event. The Games team now regularly engage the YCA Board.
- **Skills:** Gina has led engagement with the WMCA on youth skills; she has participated in multiple focus groups and co-authored an article with the WMCA Director of Productivity and Skills for FE Week.
- **Digital:** Kari is an observer member of West Midlands 5G Board and contributed to the West Midlands Digital Roadmap, providing a foreword for the report.
- **Environment:** as well as leading on the 'Count Us In' Pledge, Lily has presented to the WMCA's Environment & Energy Board and participated in #WM2041 workshops. Ibrahim has spoken about the YCA's aims for the Environment on a Mayor Faith Briefing.
- **Transport:** Kashmire and Asad have met with the MD of Transport for West Midlands and participated in WMCA Overview & Scrutiny Transport Subcommittee. Councillor Kath Hartley, Chair of WMCA Transport Delivery Committee praised their chapter of the YCA Vision report as reflecting the priorities of people across the region.
- **Housing and Regeneration:** Ayan and Avtar met with the WMCA Director for Housing and Regeneration where they discussed the need for inclusive, green and affordable places. Ayan also championed Inclusive Growth as a panellist at the Midlands UK Forum for Growth event in November 2020.
- **Inclusive Communities and Wellbeing:** Georgia, Olivia and Daniel met with WMCA policy leads around the Health of the Region report and Community Recovery priorities. Daniel and Olivia also joined the judging panel for the Community Recovery Innovation Challenge.
- **Co-Chairs:** Aisha and Chris coordinated the YCA Vision report and have led the YCA Board's stakeholder engagement efforts – building relationships with regional boards, organisations and youth representatives from other Mayoral Combined Authorities.

The YCA Community

While the changes to the YCA Board were designed to boost our impact, we also wanted to identify changes that could make the YCA more inclusive. Our aim was to improve our reach across the West Midlands and give more young people a chance to have a direct say on regional policy.

Our solution was to set up a ‘YCA Community.’

The YCA Community is a wider engagement forum to compliment the YCA Board and offer a flexible way for many more young people to engage on key issues for the West Midlands.

We set out our ambition to establish a YCA Community within the ‘Inclusive Communities Portfolio Update’ report to the WMCA Board in September 2020 and designed and launched our promotion campaign with Beatfreaks in December 2020.

To encourage further sign-ups, we also led a ‘Welcome Webinar’ event in March 2021 where YCA Board members and the WMCA Portfolio Lead Member for Inclusive Communities described the purpose and aspirations of setting up the YCA Community.

The aim is to develop the Community through the 2021/22 year.

The key aims and features of the YCA Community are to:

- **Boost outreach** across the region - by being open to anyone aged 16 to 25 living in the West Midlands, with no current limit on the number of members.
- Offer young people an easy, flexible and **no-commitment way** to have a say on regional issues. The idea is to invite Community members to share their views via surveys or discussions at online events. This means Community members can choose when to engage and fit this around existing commitments.
- Provide an opportunity to **help partners** engage with young people via the YCA Community – to help and encourage organisations to talk to young people as they make decisions and create more opportunities for young people to influence change.



Looking Forward

The WMCA Board has committed to supporting a Young Combined Authority that challenges, informs and influences their policy development and decision making throughout the year ahead.

Our ambition is to see the Young Combined Authority become fully integrated into how the WMCA works. We want to make sure that young people always have a seat at the table, demonstrate the value that this adds and ensure that youth engagement is secured as a central part of WMCA processes for the future.

In the June 2021/22 year, we aim to:

- **Be a positive force for change:** by meeting regularly as a YCA Board to focus on WMCA policy development. We will track our involvement and impact on shaping key priorities for the region.
- **Build closer relationships with power:** our ambition is to engage with the Mayor and every WMCA Portfolio Lead member during 2021/22, and we will also lead events where decision makers speak to young people.
- **Create opportunities for youth voice:** through working with the WMCA and/or its partners to run at least six engagements with the YCA Community over the course of the year.
- **Grow our YCA Community:** so the YCA is stronger, louder and more representative of the young people who live across the West Midlands. We also aim to strengthen our links with young people and find ways to listen to their views.
- **Leave a legacy:** by guiding the refresh of the YCA Board membership during 2021/22 and advocating for youth leadership and development opportunities.



Acknowledgements and Impact

YCA Board members

Thank you to the young leaders who participated in the YCA Board 2020/21:

Aisha and Chris, Co-Chairs of the YCA Board 2020/21.

Asad, Avtar, Ayan, Daniel, Eman, Georgia, Gina, Grace, Ibrahim, Kari, Kashmire, Lily, Michael, Olivia.

Testimonials

The next few pages capture some highlights and testimonials from the Young Combined Authority, WMCA Board members and our partners at the Beatfreaks Collective.

“The decisions the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) board take help determine the future of our region, and so it is only right that we have the next generation helping to guide our decision-making. With this in mind it really was an absolute no-brainer to set up the YCA, and this report highlights just how effective and popular the community has been in such a short space of time.

From helping to shape the region’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent recovery, to stepping up and showing leadership during the Black Lives Matter movement, the YCA have contributed to key debates for the West Midlands.

Their voices have grown in strength and confidence over the past year, and I am really looking forward to seeing the group develop throughout the next Mayoral term as we work with them to help shape key policy for the future of the West Midlands.

Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands

“From education and careers to priorities for the future, young people can experience life in a very different way from those who are older. This becomes a problem when young people are not fully represented in politics, because you need to understand what life is really like for young people to make decisions that really work for them. The Young Combined Authority helps us to tackle this challenge and bring the voices of young people to the table. They have shared their insights, challenge and passion with the West Midlands Combined Authority Board and brought a new dynamic to our discussions. YCA members are influencing real change and I hope they are proud of the difference they are making.”

Councillor Brigid Jones, WMCA Portfolio Lead Member for Inclusive Communities and Deputy Leader at Birmingham City Council

“Developing our Young Combined Authority will always be one of my proudest highlights from my time as Chief Executive of the West Midlands Combined Authority. Our YCA members are inspiring, compassionate and fierce about their vision for a better, fairer West Midlands. As a group, they truly represent the youth and diversity of our communities and it has been a real privilege to help them find their platform, confidence and power. Young people are our future – and it there was ever any doubt of that, you need only to look at the Young Combined Authority.”

Deborah Cadman, WMCA Chief Executive

“Prior to being a part of the YCA, I lacked in confidence and belief in myself. I felt like my voice wasn’t heard. There was a lack of representation from young people like me in terms of protected characteristics (BAME and disability). Getting on the YCA has enabled me to achieve getting on the Cultural Leadership Board, Young Women’s Trust, presenting at WMCA Board and speaking at a West Midlands Women’s Voice webinar. Additionally, the YCA has allowed me to achieve a personal dream of working for the NHS as a Personal Assistant! A big thanks to Beatfreeks and WMCA for their support.”

Gina Patel,
Young Combined Authority

“Through the work of the Young Combined Authority and the support of both the WMCA and Beatfreeks enabled me to take the next step. Little did I dream that the first job I applied to post University would land me in the Birmingham 2022 Culture Team, and make my first role with an opportunity of a life. I will always be grateful for everyone involved and who have given me such belief in a terrific journey.”

Kashmire Hawker,
Young Combined Authority

“The YCA creates opportunities for young people to enter spaces where we typically would not be seen. Sitting on different regional boards has shown me that youth voice is both needed and wanted by those in power. A great example is where I have led the YCA’s involvement in the region’s WM2041 plans for carbon neutrality; I’ve worked directly with Councillor Ian Courts and the WMCA team, spoken at events and launched our own behavioural change campaign. A huge shoutout to the Beatfreaks team who have helped me with my YCA work but also opened so many other doors for me.”

Lily Eaves,
Young Combined Authority

“The YCA has been an incredible journey, born from a fantastic initiative. It is vital that this level of engagement continues well into the future. Young people do not only constitute a large portion of our region’s population, but they also form the entirety of our region’s future.

Co-Chairing the YCA has developed my relationships with my fellow Co-Chair, Aisha, and has given me experience of working on and chairing a board. We’ve been able to meet incredible people of influence, and meaningfully contribute to discussions on an enormous quantity of issues.”

Chris Burden,
Young Combined Authority

The YCA is a brilliant way to engage young people in the Regions leadership. Beatfrees' worked closely with WMCA over the last few years to set up and embed the YCA into the WMCA leadership. The commitment from the young people and from the WMCA to better represent our region through younger voices will always be championed by Beatfrees."

Amerah Saleh, General Manager, Beatfrees

"It has been amazing to support the Young Combined Authority - working with the members, Beatfrees and our WMCA team to bring the voices of young people into regional decision making. YCA members have been dedicated, authentic and thoughtful in their partnership with us. They have made a real and lasting contribution to the leadership of the West Midlands. I am immensely grateful for their trust in this project and the senior support it has had at the WMCA."

**Lucy Gosling,
Projects and Programme Lead (WMCA)**