

West Midlands Young Combined Authority Charter

The YCA Charter sets out how we will work together as a team and what our expectations are of each other, the West Midlands Combined Authority and the independent delivery partner, Aspire4U.

Who we are...

Around one third of people living in the West Midlands are aged under 25 years when, nationally, only 15% of councillors are aged below 45. The Young Combined Authority (YCA) was launched in 2019 to make sure the voices of young people are heard in regional decision-making. It brings together a diverse group of under-25's to guide and challenge the WMCA as it makes decisions about the future of the region – a future that will directly affect the younger generation.

Our aims are to...

1. Help the WMCA to see the world through the eyes of young people and **inform, shape, scrutinise and challenge** the decisions that will affect the futures of young people in the region.
2. Be independent and **raise awareness** of the issues that matter most to young people in the West Midlands.
3. **Champion and unite** the voices of young people, and lead by example by demonstrating a collaborative and inclusive approach to debate.
4. **Empower and engage** young people in politics, improve upon their political education and enable people to learn how to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Our values are to...

1. **Make sure we really represent**, understand and work with the young people we speak for, by reaching out to all communities and collating feedback on the problems they do and should care about. We will work together to make joint decisions and involve other young people in our work where possible.
2. **Respect and include everyone**, regardless of who they are, where they come from or whether we agree with their views and opinions. We will always strive to be inclusive and want young people to be impacted in a positive way by our decisions.
3. **Make an impact**. We are here to make change and know that it will take many small steps to make the positive differences that will be most beneficial

to as many young people as possible. Our changes should be measurable, realistic and benefit all.

4. **Speak up and engage** in discussions whilst being mindful of the views of others and allowing everyone a chance to speak. Every voice matters, and it is important that we are authentic and accountable.
5. **Challenge the WMCA** and any other organisations or persons on decisions we do not agree with and debate with them on their responses. We are youth led and our role is to give a voice to the voiceless.

Ground rules for our meetings

Respect is at the heart of all of our ground rules. We will:

1. Respect everyone, no matter who they are.
2. Listen to everyone and make sure no voice is left out. We will join every discussion ready to listen and respect everyone's perspective.
3. Be good team players and join the monthly YCA Board meeting or let the group know when we cannot as early as possible.
4. Respect the decisions made by the group, even if we do not agree with them.
5. Be politically neutral.

These are our expectations...

Of each other:

1. All YCA members will **follow our shared values and ground rules** of respecting and supporting everyone, no matter who they are and whether we agree with their opinion.
2. We will **give everyone the opportunity to be their best** – by listening to their views and giving them time to express their thoughts. We will help people to develop their confidence and skills in expressing their ideas. We are collaborative and want to hear everyone's voice.
3. We **will be open with each other**, so people can let us know if they are upset or need space, and help us respond to them in the right way.

Of the WMCA:

4. **The WMCA will give us the opportunity**, tools and access to decision makers that we need to make a difference. This means proactively engaging with the YCA at an early stage of policy development and supporting the YCA's own project activity.

5. **The WMCA will take on board our views**, experience and feedback. This means explaining how the WMCA has considered our ideas, what action they have taken in response and to clearly justify their reasoning. We are here to shape real change, not just to be heard.
6. **The WMCA will respect our opinions**. This means not using us as puppets, but rather seeing the YCA as colleagues who work alongside them and, where necessary, constructively challenge them on certain issues. YCA members should be treated like other representatives of WMCA boards.
7. **The WMCA will be responsive** to our questions, concerns and requests. We expect that the WMCA project manager for the YCA will respond within 2-3 working days, and that decision makers at the WMCA will respond to our letters or emails within 1-2 weeks.

Of the independent delivery partner, Aspire4U:

8. **Aspire4U will offer flexible and independent support** to YCA members. This includes a point of contact who will respond to our emails within 2-3 working days and someone who we can talk to about any personal problems.
9. **Aspire4U will provide guidance and a development offer** to help us fulfil our YCA roles and aims. This includes helping YCA members to develop the tools we need to do our work, such as community engagement.
10. **Aspire4U will be advocates and youth champions**, advising and supporting the YCA and WMCA to work together in the most effective way.

When something goes wrong...

We have a clear approach to resolving any problems or conflict, and know that problems will be managed 'at the lowest level.'

1. The first step to resolving a problem is to **speak up!** It is really important that everyone feels safe and confident to share their worries, concerns or issues.
2. The next step is to **decide who to share the concern with**. We have agreed that if a problem occurs, we will talk privately with a mediator to limit any drama and hurt feelings.
3. **For small disagreements**, the right mediator may be another member of the YCA Board. This could be a person who chairs YCA meetings, or is involved with the same projects. It is important to remember that YCA members are volunteers, so it may be helpful to speak to a member of staff.
4. **For most concerns and problems**, the right mediator is probably a member of the project team at either the WMCA or Aspire4U. They can work with you to understand your concern and find the best way to resolve it. The normal

way of addressing issues will be through conversations with the people involved to find a fair way forward.

5. If the problem has been raised with the WMCA or Aspire4U and **is not being solved properly or quickly enough**, then there is a whistleblowing email address. This will be a WMCA manager: Claire.Dhami@wmca.org.uk who is the WMCA Head of Public Service Reform and Prevention.

Other policies...

The West Midlands Combined Authority also has corporate policies which relate to the YCA including the Privacy Policy and Safeguarding Policy, and YCA Board members will additionally be asked to complete consent forms to support their participation. The WMCA and our commissioned partners are committed to ensuring that all Young Combined Authority members feel safe, included and supported in fulfilling their YCA role. The YCA are volunteers and are unpaid; they do not make decisions on behalf of WMCA and therefore we do not place their addresses on general release.

How the YCA works...

YCA Board	
#1	Decisions will be made collectively by the YCA Board, which will have one meeting each month. We will respect and follow the decisions that we make together as the YCA Board.
#2	Everyone on the YCA Board has an equal say: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings will be facilitated by a chair / co-chair from the YCA Board. Their role is to make sure that everyone has the chance to speak, and that the meeting is led by young people. • The YCA Board may also choose to have member(s) act as a lead or coordinator for certain issues, for example where the YCA Board has chosen a priority or is working on a project. They have the responsibility to drive forward progress and keep the rest of the group involved and updated.
#3	All YCA Board members are leaders and representatives... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a responsibility to facilitate discussions, drive forward action and report on our activity to the full YCA Board. • We will communicate and work as a team. This means following through on our commitments, and to ask for help or let others know when we need more support to meet our goals.

#4	The YCA Board can shape its own agendas and priorities – the WMCA can offer guidance by identifying where there are opportunities to influence regional policy development.
#5	<p>The YCA Board must be politically neutral at all times...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is important because the YCA needs to be a space where everyone is welcome, and we are funded by public money. • As ‘the YCA Board or YCA members’ we cannot publicly discuss or endorse political parties, politicians or opinion. • We can campaign on policy areas or even voter turnout, if this is done in a politically neutral way (not siding with a political party).

YCA Board – subgroups and project work

#1	As well as the monthly YCA Board meetings, we will arrange optional check-ins or extra discussions for project work and development.
#2	<p>Subgroups can be set up with the agreement of the YCA Board.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These groups will lead work on certain projects or priority areas, but must report back to the YCA Board with progress and when decisions need to be made. • The groups will involve YCA Board and YCA Community members, however YCA Board members have the responsibility to coordinate and drive forward the subgroups.
#3	<p>We will take a flexible and focused approach to setting up subgroups and projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to make sure that we have the capacity to respond to opportunities and priorities as they arise. • The YCA Board will need to decide which issues to focus on – for example... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whether to cover all of the WMCA’s policy areas. ○ Whether to focus on different priorities that matter to the YCA. ○ Thinking about what size subgroups should/need to be. ○ Whether to have time-limited subgroups which are set up and then disbanded once the project is done.

Engaging with our communities	
#1	<p>The YCA Board will work with the YCA Community – which is a much wider forum for youth engagement which gives more young people a flexible way to have their say. This could be through...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting YCA Communities to get involved with subgroups. • Leading events and surveys where YCA Community members can have a say on specific issues.
#2	<p>We will also explore a few of new ideas...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Setting up a YCA inbox where we can collect and amplify the ideas of young people, and use our platform to give others a stronger voice. 2. Challenging or encouraging politicians to listen to their communities and young citizens. Our aim is to build a culture of listening to young people across all decision making in the West Midlands. 3. How we can better use the YCA's social media channels and show that we are an authentic, youth-led group.

Agreed by the YCA Board on 5 January 2022.

This Charter has been produced and approved by the West Midlands Young Combined Authority. Thank you to all the YCA Board members who led and contributed to its development.