

## WMCA Board

<b>Date</b>	10 June 2022
<b>Report title</b>	Update on Trailblazer Devolution Deal
<b>Portfolio Lead</b>	Mayor Andy Street
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### Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

#### The WMCA Board is recommended to:

- (1) Note the progress being made in relation to the Trailblazer Devolution Deal.

### 1. Process update: engaging local leaders

- 1.1 The Trailblazer Devolution Deal process is continuing with devolution proposals being developed across a wide range of themes. Proposals are being developed in accordance with the principles and plans previously agreed by the WMCA Board. In particular, proposals have a clear focus on drawing down powers and finance from Government: the roles and responsibilities held by local authorities must not be drawn away from them through this process.
- 1.2 Following the Mayor and Portfolio Leaders' meeting in April, steps have been taken to ensure the more direct involvement of Leaders in this process. Meetings have taken place between Leaders and the Chief Executive of the WMCA in order to discuss particular hopes and concerns.

- 1.3 In the absence of a formal deadline or timetable with Government, we have been able to extend the process for the development of proposals and negotiations so that it extends to the Autumn. This means that there is more opportunity for Leaders to discuss emerging proposals and for local areas to bring forward their own proposals.
- 1.4 The extended timetable ensures that all proposals can now follow a clear sequence of meetings. Devolution position papers are being discussed by relevant local authority officer groups, then by the Senior LA Officers Group and LA Finance Directors, then by the Devolution Strategy Group comprising LA Chief Executives, before finally coming to LA Leaders. Position papers are amended and adapted at each stage.
- 1.5 A meeting has been arranged for the Mayor and local Leaders to meet informally in July to discuss the proposals. A further meeting of this kind can be organised later in the process if required before the proposals are considered formally by the Board.

## **2. Government engagement**

- 2.1 Government engagement remains relatively slow while we develop agreed policy proposals. Officers are working in liaison with officials at the Cities and Local Growth Unit at DLUHC as well as specific departmental leads across Whitehall. Ministerial meetings remain informal at this stage.
- 2.2 Officials remain clear that we should be working alongside Greater Manchester in bringing forward ambitious proposals that might represent a blueprint for future devolution across England. Officers are working closely with colleagues in Greater Manchester to ensure some alignment of ambition while recognising that there are important differences between the two city-regions.
- 2.3 There remains an important imperative that proposals must be evidence-based and that any further devolution must be accompanied by clear proposals for enhanced accountability and transparency. For this reason, a West Midlands Data and Accountability Framework is being developed to provide a levelling up evidence base with explicit outcome measures for monitoring and evaluating progress. This is being based on existing frameworks and processes for measuring and monitoring progress in the region.
- 2.4 Government officials are also placing significant emphasis on the opportunities for 'funding simplification' – streamlining the various funding streams currently received by the WMCA and their bidding processes and monitoring mechanisms. More detailed proposals of this nature will be brought to a Mayor and Portfolio Leaders meeting.
- 2.5 Government has stepped back from the intention to produce some form of joint statement or framework agreement between government and the two trailblazer devolution deal areas before the summer recess. This is helpful as it means efforts can be dedicated to developing the deal itself.

### 3. Draft devolution proposals

- 3.1 The Mayor and Portfolio Leaders meeting on 20 May considered proposals concerning:
- Transport
  - Skills
  - Housing and Regeneration
  - Local Area Energy Planning
  - The West Midlands Smart City Region

There was general support for these proposals with some concerns raised about the precise nature of proposed 'Town Centre Investment Zones' and the implementation of proposed enforcement powers.

- 3.2 The next Mayor and Portfolio Leaders meeting on 5 July will consider the next batch of proposals on:
- Economy – business support, trade and investment, innovation
  - Industrial Decarbonisation
  - Retrofit

Prior to coming to Leaders, all proposals are considered by relevant local authority officer groups, the Senior LA Officers Group and LA Finance Directors, and the Devolution Strategy Group comprising LA Chief Executives. Many of the proposals are also considered by the relevant thematic boards ahead of coming to Mayor and Portfolio Leaders meetings.

Amendments are made to the original proposals based on the feedback received from these meetings.

- 3.3 Proposals are presented as summary documents using a defined template. **More detailed position papers are available upon request.** The summaries explicitly highlight where we would expect to see local benefits or double devolution in each case.
- 3.4 Further batches of proposals will be brought to these meetings during the summer according to the proposed timetable. The summary template can be amended for future batches subject to feedback.

### 4. Financial implications

- 4.1 The varying devolution proposals have quite different financial implications. Each is being considered separately. The process is being guided by the principle that the WMCA should not take on any additional responsibilities that are not properly resourced.

## **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 The varying devolution proposals have quite different legal implications including, in some cases, the potential need for primary or secondary legislation. Officers are working systematically with workstream leads to identify such implications and open discussions with relevant officials in DLUHC.

## **6. Equalities implications**

- 6.1 The primary purpose of the Trailblazer Devolution Deal is to address the pressing need for levelling up both between English regions and also within the West Midlands. The government has identified 12 levelling up missions to give direction to this purpose. All devolution proposals are being assessed against their potential to deliver one or more of the levelling up missions. The West Midlands Data and Accountability Framework will become the means by which progress in addressing regional inequalities will be measured.
- 6.2 The Race Equalities Taskforce and the Young Combined Authority are each carrying out special activities in order to engage with and shape the emerging devolution proposals. Each will report independently to the WMCA Board on 15 July.

## **7. Inclusive Growth implications**

- 7.1 See section on Equalities above.

## **8. Geographical area of report's implications**

- 8.1 The Trailblazer Devolution Deal will be agreed with the 7 constituent authorities of the WMCA. Non-constituent authorities are involved in the development of devolution proposals with a view to identifying where there might be wider benefits for the wider West Midlands area. This includes involvement on the Devolution Strategy Group.
- 8.2 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has provisions to make it easier for additional local authorities to become constituent members and for non-constituent and 'associate' members to join or leave.

## **9. Other implications**

- 9.1 None.

## **10. Schedule of background papers**

- 10.1 None.