



West Midlands
Combined Authority

WMCA Board

Date	28 October 2022
Report title	Trailblazer Devolution Deal
Portfolio Lead	Levelling Up - Councillor Brigid Jones
Accountable Chief Executive	Laura Shoaf, West Midlands Combined Authority email: laura.shoaf@wmca.org.uk
Accountable Employee	Ed Cox, Executive Director for Strategy, Integration & Net Zero email: ed.cox@wmca.org.uk
Report has been considered by	Mayor & Portfolio Leads Liaison - 14 October 2021

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The WMCA Board is recommended to:

- (1) Endorse the proposed timetable and approach to further developing and negotiating the Trailblazer Devolution Deal – subject to confirmation from Government.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform the WMCA Board of recent developments with Government around the emerging timetable for the negotiation and announcement of a Trailblazer Devolution Deal (TDD) with the West Midlands.
- 1.2 This report seeks WMCA Board's endorsement, in principle, of the proposed timeline as currently intimated by Government, albeit noting that formal confirmation of this timeline is still awaited from Government and that this may be affected by rapidly evolving events.

2. Background

Timeline

- 2.1 The Truss government's focus was primarily on Investment Zones, for which the region has submitted Expressions of Interest in a collaborative programme across the region, coordinated by the WMCA's Housing and Land Board. We continue to liaise with local authority leaders and teams following Government's request to review and rationalise the submissions to inform an announcement by Government anticipated for the end of October.
- 2.2 The region's submissions have emphasised the integration of Investment Zones with Levelling Up and TDD proposals, to ensure that the accelerated growth in successful zones achieves the desired outcomes of a fairer, greener and better-connected region.
- 2.3 'Levelling Up' featured heavily at the Conservative Party Conference although it remains to be seen what this will mean in practice in terms of legislation and policy detail given the ongoing turbulence in government.
- 2.4 The current Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Simon Clarke MP, reiterated the government's commitment to the Trailblazer Devolution Deal, and his officials have suggested the following timeline:
- 31st October MTFP – substantive 'Statement of Intent' to conclude a TDD.
 - November-December Negotiations over Deal content and text.
 - First half December Announcement of a Trailblazer Devolution Deal.
- 2.5 Clearly this is a very tight timeline but given the extent of consultation and collaboration in the development of the TDD proposals to date, the recommendation is to seize the opportunity. It should also be noted that the DLUHC colleagues have been proactively offering support in undertaking negotiations with both officials and ministers to support the region in meeting these targets.
- 2.6 **It must be emphasised that this timeline is indicative only at this stage and confirmation from the Secretary of State is still awaited.**
- 2.7 Should the timeline proceed on this basis, the expectation is that draft Deal Text will be shared with Leaders on **18th November**. This will then form the basis for final stage detailed negotiations with Government with final Deal content to be signed off by the Board at a special extra meeting proposed for **w/c 5th December (tbc)**.
- 2.8 Officers leading on each thematic workstream will be engaging their respective local authority colleagues, partners and portfolio leads on early drafts of 'deal text'. This will be based closely on the summaries of proposals developed for *Getting Devo Ready* previously shared at Mayor and Portfolio leads meetings and discussed in Leader/Chief Exec bilaterals.

- 2.9 It is proposed that the 'high level' negotiating team to take forward the detailed discussions with Government will consist of the Mayor, Cllr Bob Sleigh as Deputy Mayor, Cllr Ian Brookfield as Chair of the Economic Growth Board and Cllr Brigid Jones as Levelling Up portfolio holder. It will be important, if this timeline is to be met and the objectives from the process achieved, that on-going collaboration and engagement among officers and leaders across the region will remain vital, as such, the existing rhythm of meetings between senior LA officers, Chief Executives (Devolution Strategy Group) and portfolio leads will continue.

Proposal Development

- 2.10 Summary versions of all the proposals have been compiled into a single document. This document, *Getting Devo Ready*, provides a summary of each proposal, the benefits (both regional and local) that it is intended to unlock, opportunities for 'double devolution', and which groups have been involved in its development.
- 2.11 This has been developed in close collaboration with local authority officers. Where feedback on these proposals has been provided by local authority partners, the WMCA has, in turn, provided responses to that feedback.
- 2.12 A slide set entitled '*Local Benefits*' has also been produced. Developed with, and endorsed by local authority officers, this details the envisaged benefits for each local authority area should each element be successfully negotiated.
- 2.13 In order to address concerns that there should be a clearer narrative that binds the devolution deal together in one place, we have also developed a *West Midlands Levelling Up Growth Prospectus*. This is a more externally-facing document setting our devolution proposals in the context of existing work in the region to tackle some of the region's levelling-up challenges. Local authority colleagues supported the development of this document. It will be used to secure support from regional MPs, businesses and other key stakeholders. Electronic and hard copies have been shared and further copies are available on request.
- 2.14 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a special working group in order to scrutinise the emerging devolution proposals. The five sessions for this working group provided invaluable insight for the development of the proposals and direction on its further evolution. A summary report of the working group sessions was considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and will form part of the substantive TDD report to be presented to WMCA Board on 18th November if the above timeline is achieved.

3. Strategic Aims

- 3.1 The emerging TDD proposals, as captured in the *Getting Devo Ready* document and as reflected in the region's *Levelling Up Growth Prospectus*, have been developed to align with the WMCA's Strategic Aims – particularly Strategic Aim 5 'To secure new powers and resources from central government'

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The financial implications of each of the proposals within the *Getting Devo Ready* document have been carefully considered. The majority of the proposals have, and all remaining will have been, passed through the relevant meetings of Finance Directors.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 Proposals have been developed in close collaboration with the WMCA's Legal team who have advised on appropriate legislative frameworks and governance arrangements that will need to be considered. The team will continue to provide that advice as the Deal text is developed, drafted, and finalised to ensure compliance.

6. Single Assurance Framework Implications

- 6.1 All funding secured for these proposals will be compliant with the Single Assurance Framework. Although the responsible teams have been consulted in its development, until the content of the Deal is more defined, the full SAF implications can not yet be known.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 The development of the Trailblazer Devolution Deal has been undertaken through with clear scrutiny from an equalities perspective. Officers have reviewed emerging proposals and recommended alternative approaches to, or reinforcement of key aspects of, the Deal proposals, which have been incorporated.

8. Inclusive Growth Implications

- 8.1 The principles of inclusive growth have been fundamental to the development of the TDD and are key to the proposed 'Regional Outcomes Framework' which underpins the Deal and its objectives.

9. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 9.1 The Trailblazer Devolution Deal relates to all geographic areas of the Combined Authority. In addition, the implications, opportunities, and observations of non-Constituent Authorities have also been incorporated in the development of the TDD proposals.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1 None.

11. Schedule of Background Papers

- 11.1 Levelling Up Growth Prospectus – October 2022