



WEST MIDLANDS
COMBINED AUTHORITY

Summary of consultation analysis on proposals for a West Midlands Combined Authority

February 2016



West Midlands Consultation

The Constituent Councils of the proposed West Midlands Combined Authority carried out a public consultation, in connection with the proposals in the Scheme, to inform the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government's decision regarding the establishment of a Combined Authority in the West Midlands. This report provides the Secretary of State with a summary of consultation responses.

Development of proposals for a Combined Authority in the West Midlands

Engagement with and feedback from neighbouring authorities, key stakeholders and the public is key to shaping and defining the Combined Authority proposals. This has particularly been the case with shaping the Combined Authority through engagement with neighbouring authorities and the three Local Enterprise Partnerships that cover the area: The Black Country, Greater Birmingham and Solihull and Coventry and Warwickshire.

Early in the development of proposals for a Combined Authority, Leaders of the seven Metropolitan Authorities set out their ambition to collaborate across the three LEP area. This engagement and collaboration shaped the Combined Authority proposals and has culminated in five districts, at least one from each County comprising the three LEP area (Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire), and the three LEPs, joining the West Midlands Combined Authority as Non-Constituent members.

Building on earlier engagement and in response to changing legislation, whereby if the Constituent Councils carry out a consultation that is deemed sufficient no further government consultation is required, the Constituent Councils carried out a consultation between 18th January – 8th February 2016. The consultation is to inform the Secretary of State's decision to establish a Combined Authority in the West Midlands. The Consultation sought views on the Combined Authority Scheme and proposals to establish the Combined Authority.

Consultation across the West Midlands

- Survey hosted on the front page of the West Midlands Combined Authority website, consisting of 6 key questions, an affiliation question and a free text option.
- Survey links provided on each Constituent Council website
- Supporting PR to signpost people to the website
- Usual Council channels to engage with elected members
- Liaison with key stakeholders.

Additional engagement across the West Midlands

Engagement across the West Midlands region from July 2015 involved:

- An on-going series of formal briefings and events with the business, private, educational and third sector communities across the region. These include: the three Chambers of Commerce from across the three Local Enterprise Partnership geography, Sustainability West Midlands, The National Careers Service, The Law Society, Improvement and Efficiency West Midlands (IEWM), CVS organisations, Future Networks West Midlands, University of Birmingham and The Skills Show, with more events planned over forthcoming months
- Opportunities for the public to provide feedback through contact details on the West Midlands Combined Authority website and through usual Council channels
- Held a West Midlands Combined Authority Parliamentary event at Westminster, hosted by Ian Austin MP with speakers from government and business, which explained the vision for the emerging WMCA and priorities moving forward. This attracted key stakeholders from across the private, public and voluntary sector plus partners including HS2 and higher education
- Attended and staged fringe events at both the Conservative and the Labour Party Conferences which attracted a total of around 200 conference delegates plus journalists, lobby groups and partners
- Proposed, supported and liaised with the LGA in staging a Devolution event in Birmingham which attracted delegates from across the country
- Chief Executives and Leaders have also been invited to speak at a series of events organised by third parties including Waites Housing Forum, The British Property Federation and Capital conferences
- Additionally there has been a series of briefings for members of the public through individual local authority communication and engagement channels; for instance community forums, area panel meetings, online questions and answers and direct mail. There has also been regular coverage in all local, regional and specialist media that includes print, broadcast and digital which is monitored and responded to on a daily basis.

Online consultation analysis

The online survey was completed by 1,907 respondents, consisting of 6 key questions, an affiliation question and a free text option, which had 833 responses (1 repeated). For the purpose of this summary the free text feedback has been grouped into common themes later in the report.

For survey questions 1 – 5, five response options were provided:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't know

The survey was as follows:

1. By working together more closely, through a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Councils will be better placed to deliver improved outcomes in relation to economic development, regeneration and transport across the West Midlands region.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

2. Our regional Local Enterprise Partnerships (voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses) will ensure there is a strong business voice within the Combined Authority and help it to deliver improved outcomes in relation to economic development, regeneration and transport across the West Midlands region.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

3. In order to improve collaborative working across local authorities it is important that all local authorities in the West Midlands conurbation, as well as neighbouring and economically linked authorities, are invited to participate in the workings of the WMCA.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

4. By better coordination of strategic issues on economic development, regeneration and transport across the region and by improving partnership working through the creation of a Combined Authority, councils will be better placed to secure more effective and convenient local government and better services in general.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]



5. The Combined Authority should not be a 'super council' and the democratic sovereignty of individual councils must be retained. This is important to ensure that a Combined Authority will not have an adverse effect upon the identity and interests of local communities.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

6. Are you responding to this survey as:

A local resident

A business or organisation

An employee of a local authority within the West Midlands

A councillor within the West Midlands

Other

7. Which local authority are you or your organisation most closely associated with?

Birmingham

Coventry

Dudley

Sandwell

Solihull

Walsall

Wolverhampton

8. Please provide any further comment on the Scheme below:

Top line survey results

West Midlands Combined Authority	Strongly Agree/ Agree		Strongly Disagree / Disagree		Don't know	
	Responses	%	Responses	%	Responses	%
1. By working together more closely, through a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) councils will be better placed to deliver improved outcomes in relation to economic development, regeneration and transport across the west midlands region.	1227	65	575	31	91	5
2. Our regional Local Enterprise Partnerships (voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses) will ensure there is a strong business voice within the Combined Authority and help it to deliver improved outcomes in relation to economic development, regeneration and transport across the West Midlands region.	1122	60	596	31	169	9
3. In order to improve collaborative working across local authorities it is important that all local authorities in the West Midlands conurbation, as well as neighbouring and economically linked authorities, are invited to participate in the workings of the WMCA.	1360	72	457	24	58	3
4. By better coordination of strategic issues on economic development, regeneration and transport across the region and by improving partnership working through the creation of a Combined Authority, councils will be better placed to secure more effective and convenient local government and better services in general.	1156	61	588	32	139	7
5. The Combined Authority should not be a 'super council' and the democratic sovereignty of individual councils must be retained. This is important to ensure that a Combined Authority will not have an adverse effect upon the identity and interests of local communities.	1598	84	213	11	74	4

Respondents may not have answered all questions and % are rounded and so may not add up to 100%.

Survey Statistics

Question 1

By working together more closely, through a West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) councils will be better placed to deliver improved outcomes in relation to economic development, regeneration and transport across the west midlands region.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

Responses: Question 1 was the third highest ranked strongly agree / agree question overall, with 65% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing.

Question 1 was one of the most supported by business/organisations, 87% of businesses/organisations respondents agreed/strongly agreed with the statement in question 1. 47% of residents that answered this question agreed / strongly agreed.

Question 1 was most strongly agreed with by Wolverhampton affiliated respondents (87% agree / strongly agree) and Birmingham (80%), but only 32% in Coventry.

Question 2

Our regional Local Enterprise Partnerships (voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses) will ensure there is a strong business voice within the Combined Authority and help it to deliver improved outcomes in relation to economic development, regeneration and transport across the West Midlands region.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

Responses: Question 2 was the lowest ranked agree / strongly agree overall (60%).

44% of residents agree / strongly agree with the statement, and 75% of businesses/organisations agreed/strongly agreed that the LEPs will ensure a strong business voice to help deliver improved outcomes.

Again Birmingham and Wolverhampton affiliated respondents agree most strongly, with Coventry the least supportive.



Question 3

In order to improve collaborative working across local authorities it is important that all local authorities in the West Midlands conurbation, as well as neighbouring and economically linked authorities, are invited to participate in the workings of the WMCA

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

Responses: This was the question with the second highest proportion of agree / strongly agree (72%). With 58% of residents and 88% of businesses agreeing / strongly agreeing that for improved collaborative working, all West Midlands local authorities should be invited to participate in the workings of the WMCA.

Wolverhampton, Birmingham and Walsall affiliated respondents support with over 80%. Coventry were the least supportive with 47%.

Question 4

By better coordination of strategic issues on economic development, regeneration and transport across the region and by improving partnership working through the creation of a Combined Authority, councils will be better placed to secure more effective and convenient local government and better services in general.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

Responses: This was the fourth most supported question (61%), with 46% of residents and 82% of businesses agreeing / strongly agreeing with the statement.

The supportive response was as above, Wolverhampton and Birmingham most supportive with Coventry the least.

Question 5

The Combined Authority should not be a 'super council' and the democratic sovereignty of individual councils must be retained. This is important to ensure that a Combined Authority will not have an adverse effect upon the identity and interests of local communities.

[Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, Don't Know]

Responses: This was the most strongly supported question (84% agree / strongly agree). Within the respondents, 81% of residents, and 81% businesses/ organisations agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

By council, Wolverhampton (91%) and Coventry (88%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.



Questions 1 – 5: ‘Don’t know’ responses received

The highest area (9%) where respondents ‘didn’t know’ if they agreed or disagreed was in relation to whether ‘our regional Local Enterprise Partnerships (voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses) will ensure there is a strong business voice within the Combined Authority and help it to deliver improved outcomes in relation to economic development, regeneration and transport across the West Midlands region.’

This was followed closely (7%) by the statement in question 4, relating to whether ‘by better coordination of strategic issues on economic development, regeneration and transport across the region and by improving partnership working through the creation of a combined authority, councils will be better placed to secure more effective and convenient local government and better services in general.’

This is in the context of over 61% of respondents agreeing with the statement in question 4.

Coventry

Since Coventry’s decision to form part of the West Midlands Combined Authority, there has been widespread local media coverage on the issue and a lively debate locally on the implications of joining a Combined Authority.

Some residents fear that the move could see Coventry losing its identity and sovereignty as a major English city and become part of a larger council dominated by Birmingham, losing the city’s historic links with Warwickshire. Two petitions were started calling for the issue to be put to a referendum. The most robust negative comments have been sent through the free text box, a summary of which is provided below.

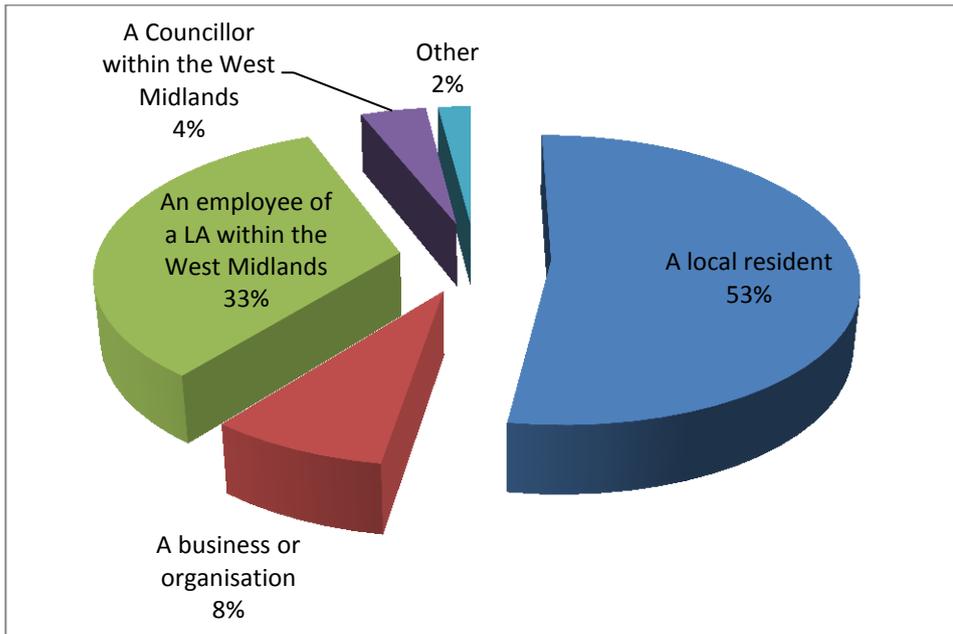
In response and recognition of the concerns raised in Coventry, there has been a widespread programme of engagement and consultation since July 2015. Engagement will continue in the area.

Question 6

Are you responding to this survey as...?

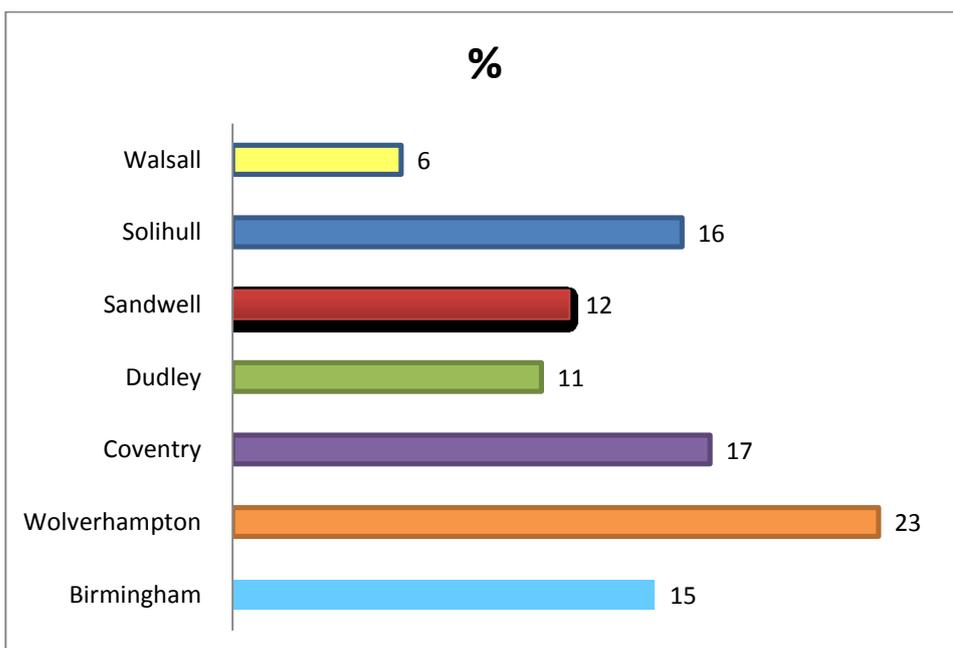
- A local resident
- A business or organisation
- An employee of a local authority within the West Midlands
- A councillor within the West Midlands
- Other

Responses:



Question 7

Which local authority are you and your organisation most closely associated with?



Question 8

Please provide any further comment on the Scheme below:

Of 1907 respondents to the survey, 832 comments were submitted under question 8. The comments varied in tone, theme and respondent profile.

Themes

Structure of the proposed WMCA

12 comments were specifically about the demonstration of unity and collaborative working across geographical as well as political boundaries.

13 responses that suggest they need more clarity on the WMCA's priorities and commissions – a few specifically on transport and 4 on housing.

27 comments that discuss the structure of the CA:

- what staffing/ Leadership arrangements will be in place – individuals stating they do not wish to see a replication of services, backroom staff
- concerned that the establishment of a CA will only add another layer of bureaucracy for individuals to get through.

8 comments about who the main figurehead should be and how the leadership team will be organised, and who will overview and scrutinise them.

44 comments of support, which were general in nature.

37 responses regarding the mayoral issue – mostly critically about why we need one, who will fill the position and what powers an elected mayor will have.

Business/ finance

18 responses expressed a desire for business to be more involved with the public and private sectors however stated that they do not want business and economic targets to supersede the other sectors.

A couple of individuals wanted to make it clear that small businesses and start-ups needed to be encouraged and helped (not just the big well-established companies).

Other individuals also suggested that the business voice should not just come from the LEPs, but through other private sector channels.

6 feedback comments referenced council tax, particularly concerned that it may increase.

19 comments that specifically state that they are pleased there has been a shift in the political/ business view of the West Midlands. Many compare the financial and

reputational advances of London and Greater Manchester and see that the West Midlands need to catch up, particularly by attracting large investments, and that the WMCA is a positive step in achieving this.

A Black Country business commented particularly that the name should be Greater Birmingham, that the Combined Authority should address the need for a world class airport as a matter of priority, whether trains can stop more regularly from Sandwell & Dudley to Euston and that the Mayor should be a non-political contest.

Consultation itself

28 comments were around wanting an actual vote on the establishment of a Combined Authority, the devolution proposal and the mayor – some of these comments suggested that the consultation process has been undemocratic.

The name

19 comments about the name of the proposed Combined Authority- the vast majority of these believe Birmingham should be in the name because this is already a recognisable international location and therefore better for the Combined Authority brand.

Identity

The theme of identity has been a substantial topic within the consultation, with 214 responses on this and with levelling degrees of tone. The theme of identity has been broken down further below, highlighting where the issue of identity is considered significant:

- 91 responses are in part or wholly to do with Coventry's decision to become a constituent member of the WMCA, the pattern throughout these comments being Coventry does not belong or need to be associated with Birmingham and the Midlands, in particular because of the already close associations/ geographical proximity to Warwickshire.
- 55 comments that specifically state an aversion to being aligned with Birmingham, more specifically the City Council, due to its perceived poor finances, service delivery and governance structure.
- There were 28 comments specifically from Solihull affiliated respondents regarding identity, with some wider comments. A summary of these comments are: concern about being 'pulled down' by other areas as Solihull is a successful area, not wishing to be part of the larger authorities (in particular Birmingham), questioning how will it stand up against the larger authorities, loss of individuality, Solihull finances being spent by others, nonsensical to join the other six authorities, loss of different character from the other authorities, expensive damage to reputation, no vote on the matter, Solihull interests not being pushed.

- There were 12 comments from Dudley, Sandwell, Wolverhampton and Walsall collectively around issues such as the importance of retaining local identity.
- 33 commentators did not name a specific council area but did express a desire for individual places and their respective Local Authorities to remain separate or at least uniquely identifiable.

Responses outside of the Combined Authority area

Though the Consultation was carried out by the Constituent Councils, to inform the Secretary of State's decision to establish a Combined Authority, several respondents from other areas of the West Midlands have provided feedback and support for the establishment of the Combined Authority, including Stratford and Redditch.

Questions posed

In addition to comments, a number of questions were posed:

- It would be good for us to know if any existing Combined Authority – what have been the benefits as well as challenges. Secondly, will the elected mayor have the power to make decisions unilaterally?
- Is there a maximum yearly percentage levy rise per year that the Combined Authority can impose before consulting its residents?
- There is no direct representation of the Mental Health service users on the Commission. Why not?
- Transparency is key to enable the current workforce to make an informed decision in regard to their own future – will the WMCA result in more remote working?
- Will the expectation be a smaller workforce once the scheme is co-ordinated and shown to run more effectively?
- What powers will the Combined Authority have to raise local tax or increase council tax?
- Who will the newly formed Combined Authority be governed by? Who will they be held accountable to? If there are any complaints about them who will be responsible for dealing with issues?

Respondents were not required to submit an email address to proceed with the survey therefore responses will be addressed indirectly through the FAQ's on the WMCA



website. The opportunity remains to contact the Combined Authority through the website 'contact form' and through usual Council channels.

Stakeholder support

The questions most supported by businesses and organisations are detailed in the 'survey statistics' section above.

We also received support from some of the key stakeholders in the Midlands region through comments in question 8:

Aston University

"Aston University is very supportive of the collective approach to economic development and regeneration. This university, and the others in the area, are playing a strong role but this could become even more helpful if joint procurement of research and business support services is enabled through the combined authority. The assets of the universities, through its academic staff, their physical facilities and their student population can all be more strongly aligned if a consistent approach is developed by the WMCA. The economic impact of the spend associated with the universities is very significant but these calculations always underplay the ability of the universities to make a real difference to the innovation capability of businesses and to a region's ability to attract central government support that can create new facilities and centres that in turn attract private sector investment. The formation of a combined authority, the existence of the LEPs and the promotional concept of the Midlands Engine are all very positive to increase activity to stimulate economic development but at this moment in time there is some uncertainty about the practical governance of collaborative activity and a fear that even more groups will be spawned that then need senior support. Whilst ERDF and ESF funding are allocated at LEP area level and can in principle fund collaborative area activity, the mechanics are not straightforward and it may be helpful to review at an early stage with the LEPs and DCLG/DWP how the processes can be streamlined."

Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust

"Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust comments - The Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD) says Green Growth "..... means fostering economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies. To do this, it must catalyse investment and innovation which will underpin sustained growth and give rise to new economic opportunities." The economic prosperity of the West Midlands relies on a rich and healthy environment. A high quality and resilient environment makes a vital contribution to the West Midlands economy, business competitiveness and attracting inward investment, people's health and well-being, and quality of life. A healthy environment provides a healthy population; with biodiverse green space for physical and social activities, and reduced

air pollution and heat stress; people are happier, healthier and proud of their region. Businesses that take a sustainable approach to growth contribute to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the region, and of their local communities. It will be essential for the WMCA to ensure that the important opportunity to consider the economic, environmental and social needs of the West Midlands is taken. To achieve this, we emphasise that the early engagement and on-going involvement of the social and environmental sectors (as well as other third sector partners) is crucial if the WMCA is going to achieve its aims and objectives. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how such proactive involvement is best achieved.”

Birmingham & Black Country Local Nature Partnership (B&BC LNP)

“Birmingham & Black Country Local Nature Partnership (B&BC LNP) comments - Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) are a government supported initiative which aim to advance the integration of nature into a wide range of sectors and activities at the local level across England. The LNP vision for Birmingham & the Black Country (and the wider region for that matter) is “to represent and champion the essential role of the natural environment in achieving a vibrant, healthy and prosperous Birmingham and Black Country to the benefit of economy and society.” The economic prosperity of the West Midlands relies on a rich and healthy environment. A high quality and resilient environment makes a vital contribution to the West Midlands economy, business competitiveness and the attraction of inward investment, people’s health and well-being, and quality of life. A healthy environment provides a healthy population; with wildlife-rich green space for physical and social activities, and reduced air pollution and heat stress; people are happier, healthier and proud of their region. Businesses that take a sustainable approach to economic prosperity contribute to the economic, social and environmental well-being of the region, and of their local communities. The Birmingham Green Commission Natural Capital Roundtable supports this evidence confirmed in the Roundtable Position Paper and by the three Actions for the People, Place and Economy priorities. It will be essential for the WMCA to ensure that this opportunity to significantly improve the economic, environmental and social needs of the West Midlands is taken. To achieve this, the LNP emphasises that the early engagement and on-going involvement of the social and environmental sectors (as well as other third sector partners) and key partnerships is crucial if the WMCA is going to achieve its aims and objectives. The B&BC LNP would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how such proactive involvement is best achieved. Later this year, the LNP intends to hold a “Showcase Event” to bring together business, health, local government, environment and other sectors, to consider the key aim of integrating the environment with business, progressing collaboration between LNP and LEP activities and providing a platform for knowledge exchange. The event is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 15th June at a venue at Birmingham City University in Birmingham City Centre. Further details and invitations will be sent out in due course. The B&BC LNP hopes that the WMCA will be able to take up this positive opportunity for engagement.”

The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust

*“The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust (New Cross and other hospitals & services) has these basic views on the CA: * we are enthusiastic about regional collaboration and planning of services, this is exactly how the NHS functions at its best - we hope the CA is a big success * whilst we have great connectivity with the Black Country and other local cities, nonetheless our footprint of patient catchment extends (like Wolverhampton University does) out west into Staffordshire and Shropshire. This organic overspill needs to be understood and not disrupted by the CA borders * If there are opportunities to play into the CA project we would be happy to help.”*

Sandwell Community Caring Trust

“Sandwell Community Caring Trust is a care organisation and a charity caring for over 650 vulnerable and disabled adults including older people and older people with dementia. we are one of the largest care providers in Sandwell. Our organisation strongly supports the development of the combined authority and recognise the opportunities it will be able to generate for long term sustainable growth. But more importantly help to minimise the impact of rapidly reducing local government budgets and the impact that that has on the most vulnerable people across the West Midlands. i'm told that across the West Midlands the care industry directly and indirectly employs 160,000 people so it makes a huge contribution to the fabric of the social areas more but more importantly the economic stability and sustainability of the area. Whilst the combined authority is currently envisaged to have a limited role thereby protecting local democracy and identity it should consider the care sector as an area for its future development. This is particularly important when considering commissioning services for very complex and often small numbers of vulnerable adults. Often these are not financially viable for each local authority to develop and would be better to be commissioned across the whole of the West Midlands. The opportunity for the local authorities within the combined authority to generate savings within their adult care budgets would be huge and these opportunities should not be missed at a time of ever increasing pressure on social care budgets. Good luck and lets hope for a very very positive outcome...”

West Midlands Regional Sustainability Forum

“Dear... I am responding to this survey on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Sustainability Forum which brings together a number of environmental nongovernmental organisations such as. We would like to record, again, our interest in the work of the Combined Authority. It represents an important opportunity for joined up consideration of the economic, environmental and social needs of the area but it will be essential to ensure that all those elements are considered in an appropriate way in the decision making process. To achieve that we would stress the importance of early engagement and the on-going involvement of the social and environmental sectors, as well as other third sector partners, if the WMCA is going to achieve its aims and objectives. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you how such proactive involvement is best achieved. We note in particular that there is to be a Land Commission. We would like reassurance about who is going to be involved with this

and how issues such as biodiversity loss, the growing of food, the potential threats from flooding and our wider relationship with nature will be addressed. We hope this is helpful, although without a clear context or process of engagement it is hard to answer the questions. Although Q4 clearly goes to the heart of the issue we would suggest that further proactive engagement with the sustainability sector as well as wider civil society by the emerging WMCA will be required to make genuine progress”

Walsall’s Economic Board

“I write on behalf of Walsall’s Economic Board to offer our support and endorsement of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the work that is being done by the Shadow Board in moving this important economic agenda forward.

As a forum for private to public sector engagement, Walsall Economic Board (WEB) wants to utilise our partnership to drive Walsall’s economic prosperity locally but also participate in activity that supports the sub- region and region in turn. Walsall businesses are contributing significantly to the performance of the locality and are able to demonstrate fantastic innovation and successful export stories, we therefore see the WMCA as bringing about even greater opportunities to promote our businesses at a national and international level. On behalf of the Walsall Economic Board can I wish you continued success in your endeavors.”

Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce

“Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce (and a Partner of the West Midlands Chambers of Commerce) welcome the opportunity for local Government reform and the proposed move to a Combined Authority, giving greater investment opportunity for a greater / larger geography. It is important that the ambitions (and opportunities) around local government reform at a time of reducing budgets are not lost amongst other big-agenda issues such as skills and infrastructure. Chambers of Commerce are a barometer of the economy with real time and future business intelligence, a credible track record of business engagement (large and small businesses, of all sectors) and a supporter of business would hope that the new Governance structures are streamlined, add value and do not seek to simply re-invent the wheel.” (Contact form – direct from website)

DCS Group UK, Enable Software – Stratford-upon-Avon

“...I am pleased to say that I have led a business campaign to get Stratford-upon-Avon District Council to change their minds and join the WMCA. Great news yesterday - the decision to join is confirmed...”

Redditch Borough Councillor

“I am a Redditch Borough Councillor. I am very keen to see Redditch very actively involved with the West Midlands Combined Authority as I feel Redditch has much in common with the West Midlands especially Birmingham. Redditch is close to



Birmingham through transport links and many residents work in towns within the West Midlands. I would like to see improvements to transportation, health provision, business development, skills development and combined working to provide a better future for our residents. I feel we will be better placed to see Redditch moving forward through being part of the WMCA.”

West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority (WMFRA)

“WMFRA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) consultation and has provided additional comment [appended to this report] ... In respect to Q7 we are closely aligned to all 7 Local Authorities.”

Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce

“The Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce see the WMCA as an important opportunity to create a strong, shared vision for the region and drive forwards economic prosperity, contributing to the wider vision of a Midlands Engine for growth. In addition, we support the strategic approach of the WMCA. Since businesses operate beyond local authority boundaries we welcome the WMCA addressing strategic priorities as a region. However, we do feel that a stronger mechanism for meaningful business engagement is needed when it comes to the implementation of a Supplementary Business Rate than the LEP mechanism specified above. According to the West Midlands Combined Authority Devolution Deal Agreement document published on the gov.uk website a WMCA Mayor would have; “The ability to place a supplement on business rates to fund infrastructure, with the agreement of the relevant local enterprise partnership boards, up to a cap”. While we support the use of innovative sources of local funding for infrastructure programmes that will be of clear benefit to the local business community, we believe that engagement needs to go further than LEP approval. We believe that businesses within the proposed SBR area should be formally consulted directly/in partnership intermediaries and membership organisations such as (where relevant) Business Improvement Districts, Chambers of Commerce and industry groups. As the Business Improvement District model shows, where businesses can see a tangible and direct benefit to an additional tax, they will support it. If a SBR is ‘done unto’ businesses rather than ‘with’ them and the rationale and eventual benefits not communicated compellingly and effectively, they will not support it. If businesses in a set geographical area feel (even incorrectly) that they are being taxed unfairly, it could have a detrimental impact on enterprises’ willingness to set up, stay and grow in that locality. For that reason, we are unable to agree with statement 2 and would urge the WMCA to strengthen their plans for engaging with businesses on this subject. As stated above, overall we are highly supportive of the concept of a West Midlands Combined Authority and pleased to see the pace with which it is progressing. We look forward to continuing to work positively with the WMCA, including supporting WMCA engagement with local businesses at the next WMCA-Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce event in the near future.”

West Midlands Civil Society Forum

“The purpose of the West Midlands Civil Society Forum is to engage communities and civil society with the work of the West Midlands Combined Authority so that all can benefit from a growing economy. We will do this wherever possible through existing networks. We wish to help shape appropriate WMCA programmes so they meet the needs of all communities and neighbourhoods leaving no voice unheard. In particular we wish to help design and review research and influence contract specifications to ensure that they benefit all neighbourhoods.

At a conservative estimate we comprise: 20k local groups with an annual turnover of about £1.4bn; 34kFTE of paid staff; 480k volunteers worth a further £1.3bn p.a to the region’s economy; and a spending power of £3.3bn. Between us we deliver about 31m interventions for local people in the WMCA area every year. It is our intention to continue to expand our membership, growing alongside the development of the WMCA...Taking this into account we will set up a series of online thematic working groups to identify third sector and civic issues as well as comment on the papers going to the WMCA board. These groups will mostly be based around the subject areas covered by the WMCA, with one or two people from our group to act as coordinators who send out papers, seek comments on them and more generally on the topic. It would also be their role to seek to widen out membership of the groups.”

Direct Contact Form via website

“I have seen first hand the huge improvements that have been made by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority which is made up of the ten Greater Manchester Councils working together with other local services to improve the authority. They have new Tramways linking strategic areas the Trafford Centre, Manchester Airport etc. I believe they have obtained greater funding of £380 m+ for the building of new transportation and infrastructure around the greater authority. This has been further improved by the announcement of £450 m transformation funding from NHS England to help towards creating a sustainable and successful health and social care system in Greater Manchester by 2021. We in the West Midlands would benefit greatly from this form of devolution.” (Contact form – direct from website)

“I feel very optimistic about the opportunities that the CA brings to the region. It will provide a really beneficial vehicle for the development and delivery of economic and social change for the West Midlands in the future.” (Contact form – direct from website)

Additional submissions of support

In addition to the survey, appended to this report are letters of support for the Combined Authority proposals from:

- The three LEPs covering the proposed Combined Authority
- West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner
- The Chambers
- Regional MPs
- West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority
- London Midland
- Universities West Midlands
- Birmingham Children's hospital
- University of Birmingham
- Business Professional Services Birmingham
- Birmingham Arts Partnership.

Responses

Proposals on which views are sought in the consultation were regarding the Scheme and the establishment of the Combined Authority, however within the many of the responses were wider than the Scheme and the establishment of the Combined Authority. These proposals are separate from what is in the proposed devolution deal and though a Combined Authority is a pre-requisite for delivering devolution, setting up a Combined Authority has no bearing on whether in future there is to be a Mayoral Combined Authority. Though recognised as important views, such responses will be considered as part of on-going and future engagement on devolution.