



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

# WEST MIDLANDS GREENER TOGETHER PANEL

BUS FRANCHISING & PANEL FUTURES WORKSHOP 1 (28 September 2024)

# Welcome back

- **Involve:** the UK's public participation charity, on a mission to put people at the heart of decision-making
- **West Midlands Combined Authority:** led by the directly-elected Mayor of the West Midlands. Combined Authorities are set up to invest in their regions through collaboration with partners, including local councils.
- **Facilitators:** Rob, Amanda, Anita, Paul, La Toyah
- **Supporting:** Katie (WMCA)
- **Speakers:** Steve and Alice (WMCA)

# Ground rules

- There are no right or wrong answers
- If you don't understand something, just ask
- Respect each other and our different views and experiences
- Be mindful how you phrase things to avoid others taking offence or feeling singled out
- Give each other time to speak – the facilitator will help with this
- Give each other your full attention – stay engaged
- Stick to one conversation at a time
- Respect confidentiality
- Try to stay on topic



SEP

14

## This month's work

Last time online we learnt about bus franchising – what it means, what's changing in the West Midlands and why the WMCA wants to run a region-wide consultation on how it works.

This is to help Transport for the West Midlands design that consultation so that the WMCA – and the public – can get the most out of it.



SEP

28

# This month's work

So today we are:

- a) Picking up the bus franchising discussion that we start last time
- b) Sharing your most recent feedback on the whole assembly process and asking for your opinions on how the WMCA takes it forward

# This morning's programme

TIME	ACTIVITY
<b>Helping to shape a public consultation on bus franchising (continued from last time)</b>	
10.00	Welcome and introduction
10.15	Recap on bus franchising and what you told us last time
10.30	Group work: how would you present bus franchising to a public audience?
11.40	BREAK
12.00	Group discussion
<b>Review of the Greener Together Panel and thinking about its future</b>	
12.15	Presentation: what you've told us about your experience so far
12.30	Group discussion



# Recap on bus franchising

# Some headlines...

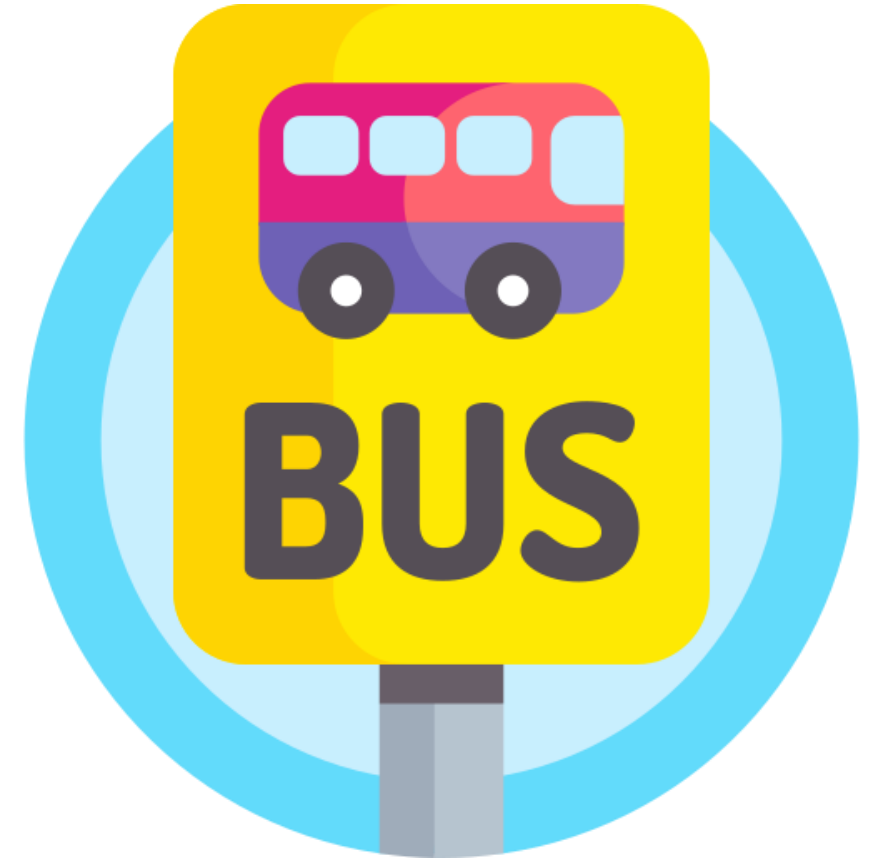
- Since 1986 (outside London), all aspects of providing bus services (routes, timetables fares, operating hours, vehicles etc) have been set by bus operators
- Operators need a license to run buses from the traffic commissioner, primarily for safeguarding purposes, but the operators design the routes and timetables - there is no contractual relationship between the bus operators and the Local Authorities.
- Local Authorities can subsidise routes where they consider a social need for a service that is not commercially attractive to bus companies (e.g at times or in places where there are few passengers) – 10% of routes in the West Mids are subsidised in this way.
- About half of bus company income comes from regular bus fares and almost half from public money e.g. subsidised services and payment for carrying concessionary passholders.

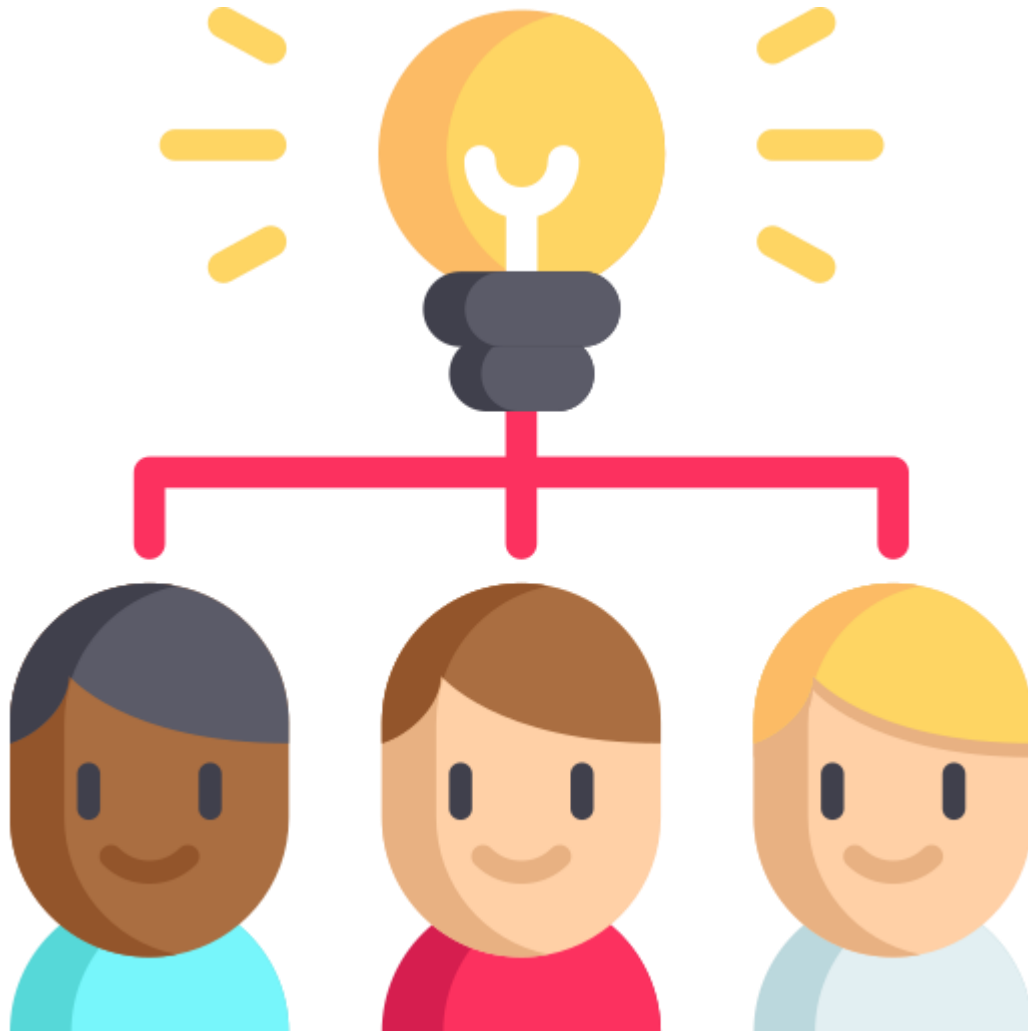




# Some headlines...

- 2017 Act provides provision for Mayoral Combined Authorities to switch to a '**Franchising**' system, similar to London model
- It is not Local Authority (municipal) ownership /operation of buses!
- Under Franchising, the Authority specifies the bus network it wants, services standards, fares etc, and then **awards contracts** to the private sector to provide the services
- Legislation requires a detailed business case, followed by external Audit and Consultation to determine whether it is the best way for bus services to be organised in the area
- Manchester in process of implementing contracts. Liverpool and West Yorkshire also have taken formal decisions to proceed.
- TfWM completed the Business Case in July 2024, which is now being audited.
- Following the Audit, we need to decide how best to meaningfully consult with the public on this.

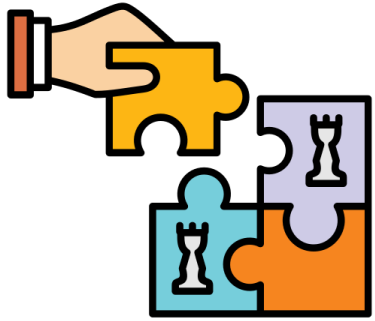




**We asked you:**

**Which ‘ingredients’ of the bus franchising topic would you be most motivated to comment on in a public consultation?**

# 1. The strategic case for bus franchising



This is about the ‘big picture’ benefits that franchising could deliver in the West Midlands. It’s about zooming out and considering how the bus system works now and how that might change under a franchising model.

Is this something you would be interested to see information about as part of a consultation process, and something you would want to give opinions on?



1

2

3

4

5



## 2. The economic, financial and commercial cases for bus franchising



This is about whether franchising would cost the public purse more than it does under the current system. Would it likely make or lose money for the tax payer? Can TfWM afford to make the changes? What are the financial risks?

Is this something you would be interested to see information about as part of a consultation process, and something you would want to give opinions on?



1

2

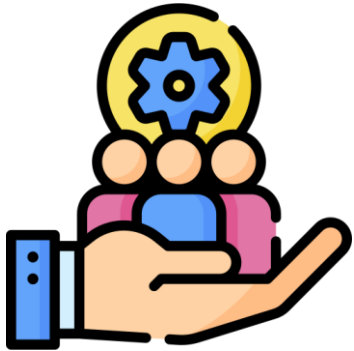
3

4

5



# 3. How the bus service is managed



This is about how management of the bus service would be done differently under a franchising model, and whether Transport for the West Midlands is be well-placed to manage a franchised bus service.

Is this something you would be interested to see information about as part of a consultation process, and something you would want to give opinions on?



1

2

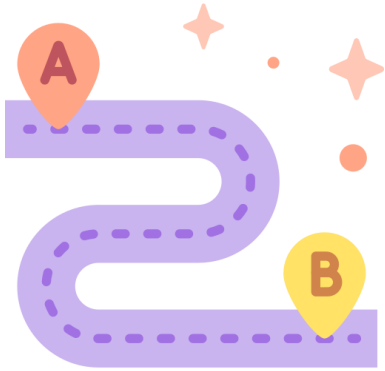
3

4

5



# 4. The bus network



This is about how we can protect people's access to buses in their area under a franchised model and the changes it could mean for how bus routes are designed in future. Through the consultation we won't be asking people what they think about specific routes, but we could talk about *how* routes are decided now and how that could change in future with a franchising model.

Is this something you would be interested to see information about as part of a consultation process, and something you would want to give opinions on?



1

2

3

4

5



# 5. The fares system



This is about understanding the impact franchising could have on bus fares. For instance, how could it enable us to keep tickets affordable? And what could be implications of different approaches for passengers?

Is this something you would be interested to see information about as part of a consultation process, and something you would want to give opinions on?



## 6. Customer experience



This is about understanding how franchising could impact on 'customer experience' in getting information and using the bus network.

Is this something you would be interested to see information about as part of a consultation process, and something you would want to give opinions on?



1

2

3

4

5





# 7. Value for money



This is about considering whether franchising will represent good value, bearing in mind the sorts of changes to bus services that may come as a result.

Is this something you would be interested to see information about as part of a consultation process, and something you would want to give opinions on?



# What did you think was most important to consult on? On a scale of 1 → 5

1. How fares are set (average 4.5)
2. Customer experience (average 4.4)
3. How routes are determined (average 4.3)
4. Value for money (average 3.9)
5. The economic, financial and commercial cases (average 3.7)
6. How the bus system is managed (average 3.2)
7. The strategic case (average 2.9)

# What was important about each of these areas?

## How fares are set

- Members felt that this was a very important area for the public to contribute. They wanted to know how franchising will impact fares, and feel that currently fares are very variable across the West Midlands.

## Customer experience

- Members also felt this was an important area for consultation, and felt there needs to be lots of information on how bus franchising will affect customer experience so that people can make a decision.
- There were questions about how this would affect customer service. Cleanliness, bus etiquette, maintenance, ease of understanding and using services, and timeliness, are all important parts of the experience and factors for using and trusting the service.
- Members asked if franchising would result in a central place for customer services.
- Members want to know what we are getting out of this franchise approach in terms of the customer experience?

## How routes are determined

- Members believe that people in the areas that the routes are running should have an input on routes, due to their extensive local knowledge.
- Members want to understand how profitable different routes are.

## Value for money

- The group felt they needed more context to understand this part of the consultation.
- Will the franchising model cost more or less?
- Members want the best service for what they have to pay; including the set up cost and ongoing charges.

# What was important about each of these areas?

## The economic, financial and commercial cases (average 3.7)

- Some members were unclear how much decision making power those who make the profits have in running the company.
- Members felt that the language around economic, financial and commercial cases could be confusing and felt that this section of the consultation would need to be frontloaded with lots of information, in order for people to be able to have an opinion on this.
- Members feel that people will want to know how the service changes will impact their pockets/council tax rates etc.

## How the bus system is managed (average 3.2)

- **Members want to understand the difference between a franchised (centralised) management and the current management and the benefits that people would expect from each. In particular members were interested in complaints and other accountability processes.**
- Some members don't want to get into the nitty gritty of how things are managed. Instead they want to be informed and they just want it to work.
- Some members felt that public input on this area might be minimal, however others felt that the current management was so bad that it was an important area to consult on.

## The strategic case (average 2.9)

- Members felt that this was more something to be informed about. They felt that information about strategy might be misunderstood and lead to unnecessary questions, and that it would waste consultation time to ask about it.
- Some members felt that it needed to make clear what the difference is, how customers would benefit. and using accessible language.
- Some members felt that part of the strategy would be for TfWM to encourage car users to switch transport methods, and explaining clearly how this change might lead to better public transport.



# **How Does Bus Franchising Happen**

# Who makes decisions?

**The Mayor**      **Mayoral Board** - Councillors from all 7 councils

## Informing their decision...

**Required processes** - listening to the results

**Statutory consultation**- required by law

**Transport Act 2000** and the **Bus Services Act 2017**

**Statutory consultation**- required by law

**Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)** and **National Bus Strategy**

# How is the decision made?

- The WMCA must put together an **assessment that offers different options** and we must be able to prove why we think that franchising is one of the best options.
- We then do a **deep dive into two options** to see if franchising is still the best option for the region in terms of **value for public money** and **supporting the development of the region.**
- We then get an **independent assessment by an outside voice.**
- These steps include an **equality impact assessment.**
- After the independent report we **consult with the public.**

# How is the decision made?

- We must prove to citizens that we have listened and taken on
- feedback from the consultation.
- It may be that we choose or cannot act on the feedback, but we must be able to evidence why.
- The WMCA then puts together a final franchising plan informed by the feedback of everyone who has been part of the process.





# **How Does Bus Franchising Happen**

# Who makes decisions?

**The Mayor      Mayoral Board** - Councillors from all 7 local authorities

## Informing their decision...

**Required processes** - listening to the results

**Statutory consultation** - required by law

**Transport Act 2000** and the **Bus Services Act 2017**

**Statutory consultation**- required by law

**Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) & National Bus Strategy**

# How is the decision made?

- The WMCA must put together an **assessment that offers different options** and we must be able to prove why we think that franchising is one of the best options.
- We then do a **'deep dive' into two options** to see if franchising is still the best option for the region in terms of **value for public money and supporting the development of the region.**
- We then get an **independent assessment by an outside voice.**
- These steps include an **equality impact assessment.**
- After the independent report we **consult with the public.**

# How is the decision made?

- We must prove to citizens that we have listened and taken on
- feedback from the consultation.
- It may be that we choose or cannot act on the feedback, but we must be able to evidence why.
- The WMCA then puts together a final franchising plan informed by the feedback of everyone who has been part of the process.

# Group activity

**Based on what you've heard and learnt so far...**

**How would you introduce the topic of bus franchising to members of the public?**

Use the information you were given at workshop 1 and your own ideas about what elements of bus franchising are most important for people to understand and what sort of language would work best.

# Group activity

## You might want to think about:

1. How you explain what 'bus franchising' means.
2. How this would be different to the way the bus system works now.
3. What questions you think it would be useful to ask members of the public to respond to.
4. Also: tell us if there's anything you're still unclear about.



**BREAK**

# Presentation time

- **Each group has 5 minutes to present back their explanation of the issue (20 minutes)**
- **Then, each group will have time to reflect on whether they would like to make any changes having heard the others (20 minutes)**





# Presentation: Your views on the panel experience so far

Got questions? Jot them down ready for our Q&A



---

# What have you told us?

---

# Members' thoughts on the process

At the end of the final session in the Climate Adaptation block, we asked panel members to reflect on their experience of the panel so far.

- ROSE = something positive or enjoyable
- BUD = something that is promising or developing for you
- THORN = something difficult

We have added a selection of responses on the next page.



“

## ROSE

**'It's eye-opening – I've learnt a lot and met like-minded people'**

**'Very empowering. I've gained confidence and have gained friends'**

**'I've liked the panel so far. I've learned a lot from the people here and not just about the environment'**

**'My group has a good democratic process'**

## BUD

**'I'm hopeful that our opinions influence decisions'**

**'How this format could be applied to other areas of the combined authority's work'**

**'I feel listened to and that my opinions taken into consideration and valued'**

**'I think I'm developing my confidence in expressing my views and having discussions/debates'**

## THORN

**'Still a little skeptical that our opinions influence decisions'**

**'Challenging to get your head around such complex issues, make big decisions on necessarily insufficient information'**

**'It can be uncomfortable, challenging'**

**'Who will turn words into action?'**

**'How much of a difference am I making?'**

”



# Survey feedback

After each session, panel members were sent a survey to record their opinions about the session.

These are summaries of the average response for each question from sessions 1-4.

## Facilitation +session format

**9.7/10** = How happy are you with the format of the session, e.g. the mix of guest speakers and group work?

**9.6/10** = How would you rate the panel session?

**9.8/10**=How would you rate the lead facilitator?

**9.7/10** = How would you rate your group facilitator?

## Communication and purpose

**9.8/10** = How clear do you feel about the purpose of the panel?

**9.7/10** = I feel I have had enough information to participate effectively.

**9.7/10** = The information I have received has been fair and balanced between different viewpoints

**9.7/10** = I have understood everything or almost everything that the other members of my small group have said during our discussions

**9.7/10** = I have understood everything or almost everything that has been presented by the guest speakers

## Support

**9.7/10** = How satisfied are you with the support and assistance provided by the organisers at Involve for this first session?

**9.6/10** = How satisfied are you with the communication you received about the arrangements in the run up to the weekend workshop?

## Deliberation

**9.8/10** = I have felt comfortable expressing my views in the small group discussions

**9.7/10**= I have had enough opportunity to express my views in the small group discussions .

**9.7/10**= feel that my fellow panel members have respected what I had to say, even if they didn't agree with me.

# Survey feedback

After each session, panel members were sent a survey to record their opinions about the session.

These are a selection of responses.

*"Good to see people face to face. As last year only on the online sessions."*

*"I would like to thank you for taking the extra steps to ensure that I could attend today's session. It made me feel a valued member of the group."*

*"Everyone really listens and I'm really enjoying the sessions"*

*" (...) I'm going to cascade the presentations to my friends and work colleagues so they can improve their knowledge and also be inspired to take action to contribute to climate change mitigation and climate adaptation. "*

*"Great facilitators"*

*"Who is going to turn words into action?"*

*"Enjoying it all, and I am glad I am taking a part in this valuable research!"*

*"Being part of the panel has been very rewarding. It is educational and enjoyable. Even though I have lived in the West Midlands since 2015, it has made me feel more embedded within the community of the region. "*

*"The panel is interesting and informative but if the public and the professionals cogitate on reasonable realistic proposals and the government are allowed to over ride centuries of natural growth/planning why are we trying?"*



# Interview comments

*'This way of doing it is far better than people turning up at a council meeting and wanting to shout at you - that can't be very helpful. Whereas this way people feel listened to, and you get that range of views in the room, not just the loudest.'*



*'The people at the front are giving you answers - normal people, not politicians who want to get elected, but normal people who are doing the jobs. All you want is someone who tells you the truth or some version of it.'*



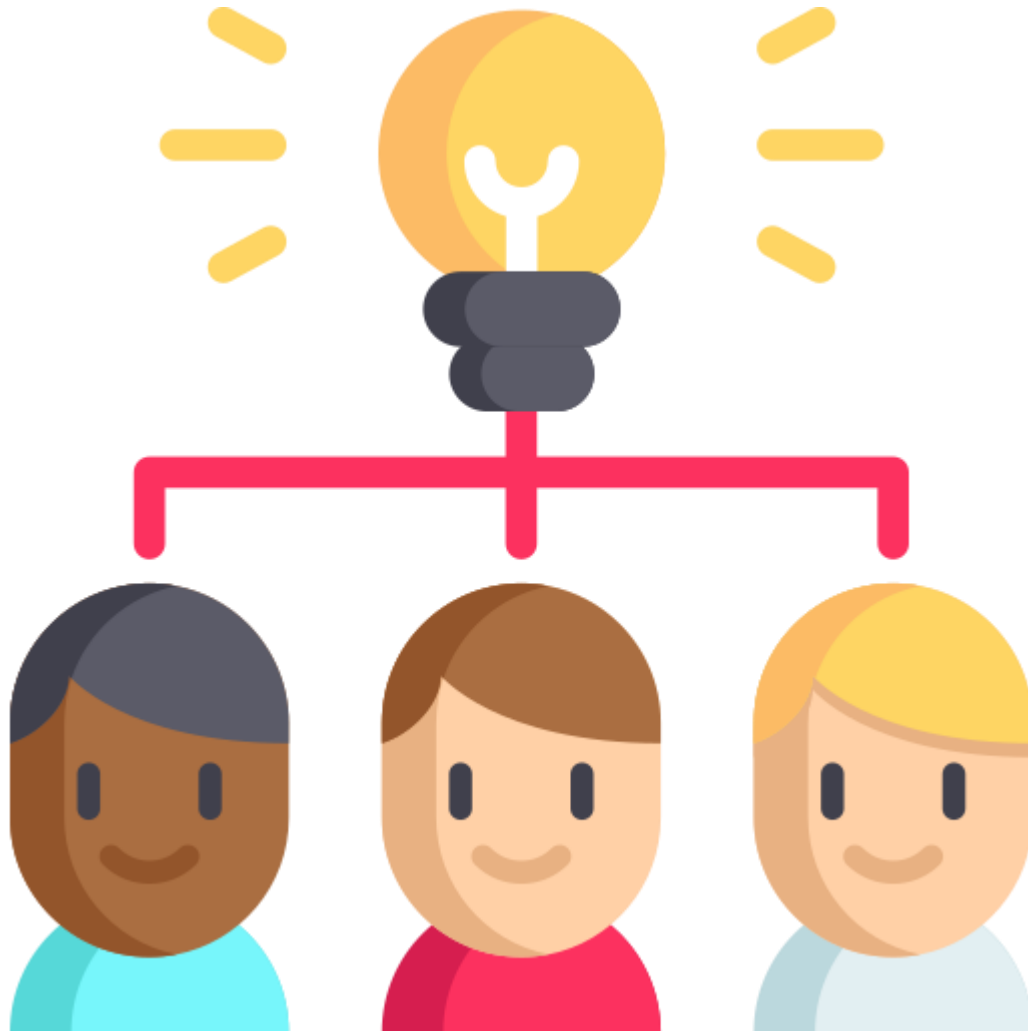
*'I've learnt about the complexities - the tensions and trade-offs - and how hard it is to keep everyone happy, because you never can.'*





# Reflections and questions





## In your groups:

Where has it been easy to engage? Where was it difficult to engage?

What is meaningful for you (or not) about being involved?

How has engagement evolved over the course of your membership of the panel?



# Headline messages from each group



**LUNCH**

# This morning's programme

TIME	ACTIVITY
<b>Review of the Greener Together Panel and thinking about its future (continued)</b>	
14.00	Feedback on the activity before lunch
14.15	Presentation: how has the Panel contributed to the WMCA's work so far? Followed by Q&A
14.45	BREAK
15.00	Group work: views on the future of the panel
16.00	Feedback of main messages
16.15	Wrapping-up
16.30	Close



# The Panel's impact so far

**Katie Jepson**  
**Environment Behaviour Change Project Officer**



**West Midlands**  
Combined Authority



**Greener**  
Together

# Why a Citizens' Panel?

In June 2019, the WMCA declared a climate emergency and set a target for the West Midlands to have 'net zero' carbon emissions each year by 2041.

5 key areas of work were established to achieve this target;

- Nature
- Buildings
- Energy
- Transport
- Circular and Green Economy

In 2022, the WMCA recognised we needed participatory and deliberative processes to allow citizens to influence this area as the decisions made will affect the region for years to come.

Air quality, Behaviour Change and Climate Adaptation have recently been added.

# How have you influenced our work?

## Air Quality

The 13 guiding principles you said should be used to guide future air quality work have been included and referred to throughout the Framework and its subsequent Implementation Plan.

### Greener Together Citizens' Panel

The Greener Together Citizens' Panel has also developed several guiding principles for our air quality project implementation, and we are committed to working with these and the Panel hereon in. These are:

#### Cost and Responsibility: Air quality measures should be...

- Brave and bold.
- Clear and transparent in their purpose and, where they generate income, how this will be spent.
- Placing the burden of change on the broadest shoulders, ensuring that specific groups are not disadvantaged by higher costs and protecting the most vulnerable.
- Good value for money for councils so that council tax bills don't increase as a result.
- Putting public benefit before corporate interests and avoid monopolies being created.



# Retrofit

## Net Zero Neighbourhood (NZN)

- Cemented thinking that **Local Authorities should be leading projects** with community organisations supporting delivery on the ground.
- **Surprised *community-led* retrofit was not favoured** and are investigating this in current cohort.
- Sandwell NZN citizen engagement being led by community organisation and training volunteers to champion the project but still being led by the Council.
- New project investigating link between existing community retrofit groups and devolved funding opportunities.

## Devolution of funding



The Panel has helped to **provide useful evidence to support retrofit interventions we would like to take**; in particular;

- You fed back that you would value a strong local authority role in bringing forward projects. **We are now seeking to give councils greater flexibility to do this** and promoting a place-based approach (as opposed to individual households)
- You highlighted the importance of having confidence in the advice and contractors in determining whether you would consider retrofit works. As a result we are looking at how we can build advice capacity across the region through devolved funding.



# Climate Adaptation



We had a meeting with the Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and they found our **engagement with the Panel to be impressive** as they are keen to support adaptation action in communities;

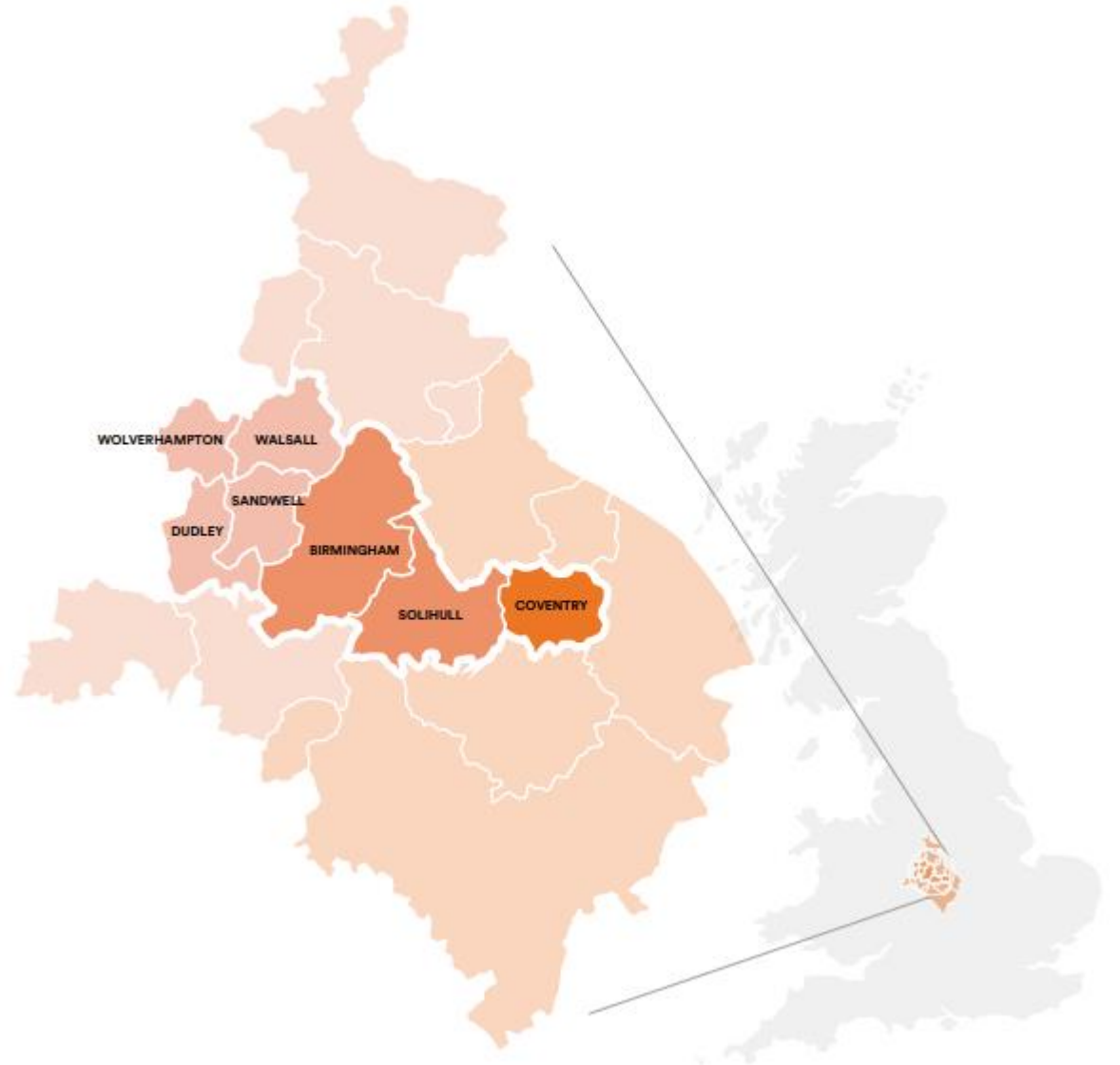
- Reflections were shared to demonstrate the need for coordinated and resourced adaptation that ***involves and engages*** communities but does not leave the *burden of cost and maintenance* to them to shoulder.
- WMCA were able to use comments to evidence the need for government bodies and arm's length bodies to lead the way – to not put the onus on individuals who might have limited power over their local areas and properties.

- Your project pitches will be used in ongoing engagement with community groups looking for funding from the WMCA for adaptation.
- Your comments around communicating climate risks **is informing our mapping work** and a new adaptation literacy e-learning module being developed.
- Your transport funding review has helped the transport team on **how we prioritise and invest in transport**, to shape conversations with the Mayor over the next few years. Also helps to make the case that we need to change the way we do things to make sure **climate adaptation is imbedded from the start**.

# How decisions are made

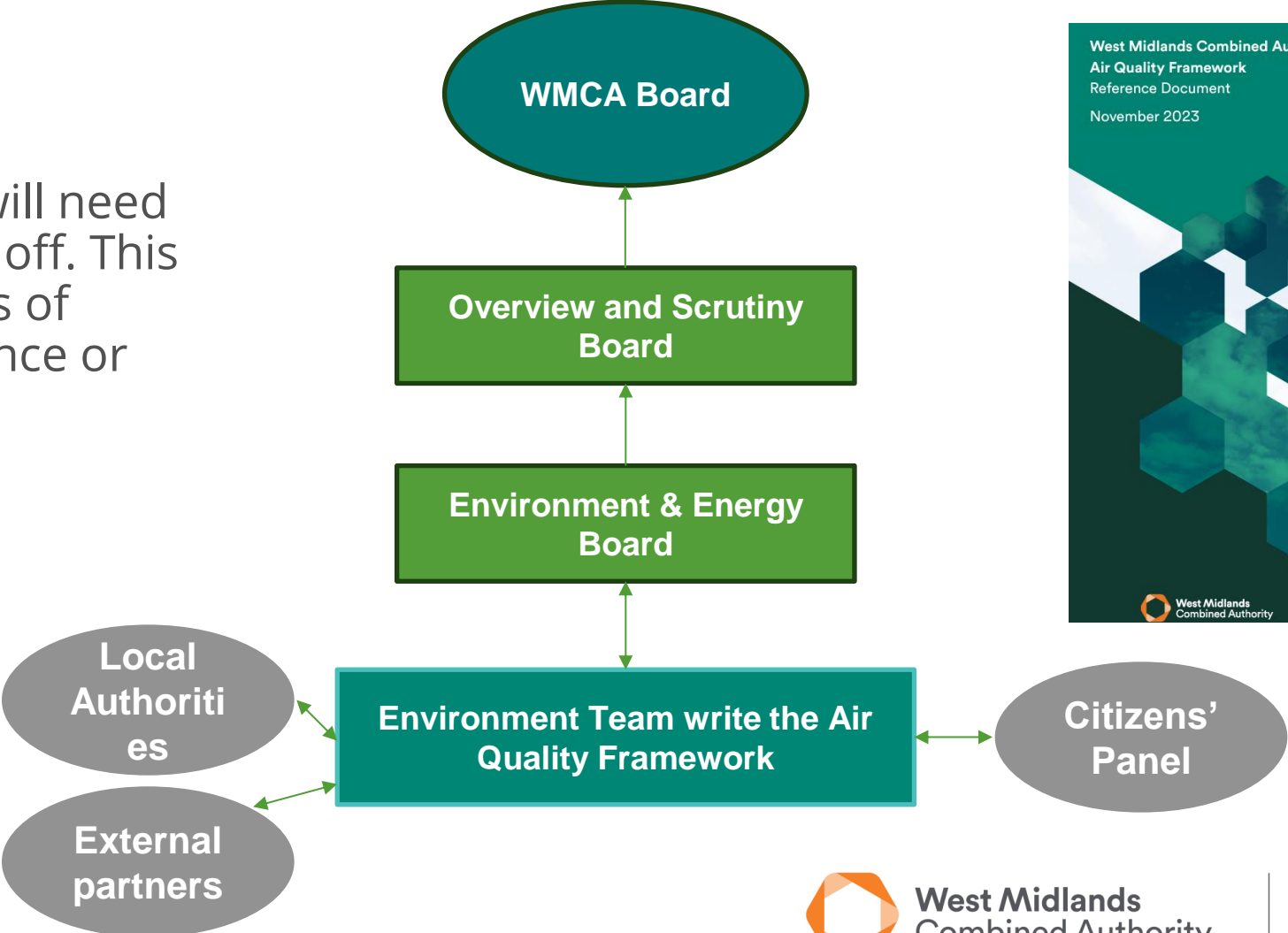
The WMCA is a regional governing body, with the 7 local authorities' constituent members.

The Mayor is elected as Chair of the WMCA and convenes the WMCA board with all the Local Authority leaders to make key decisions.



# Route to Framework Decision

Not all the WMCA's work will need to have WMCA Board sign off. This only happens if the work is of regional strategic importance or will cost over £20 million.



Board approved the Framework and it was published



# Future of the Panel

## Current Panel

Influence the environment and energy work

Have sight of work before progresses through Boards for final sign off

Narrower focus of WMCA's work

Do not get to see where Panel has influenced until work is published

## Future Panel

See a wider breadth of the WMCA's work and influence more areas  
(transport, housing, environment, skills)

Being part of the formal governance structure will mean citizens are formal part of decision-making process

Potential to have a larger panel (up to 50 people)

# Celebration event

On Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> January, we will be hosting a celebration event, for you all, as a thank you for the past 2 years of the Greener Together Citizens' Panel.

The Mayor and local councillors shall be in attendance and it's an opportunity to share with them the benefits of having citizens engaged with decision making and share all the work you have done over the past 2 years.

Venue: The Studio, Birmingham

Time 17:30 – 19:30

Scan the QR code to register





## In three groups:

What should the role of the panel be in WMCA from 2025 onwards?

How can this group play an effective role to provide citizen perspective on WMCA work/strategy? Where do you see it sitting within WMCA decision making?



# Headline messages from each group



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

**SEE YOU (ONLINE) ON  
2 NOVEMBER**