

West Midlands Insights on Society and Economy

A monthly newsletter on the trends that matter to the West Midlands.

Issue 7, April 2024

1.0 Headlines

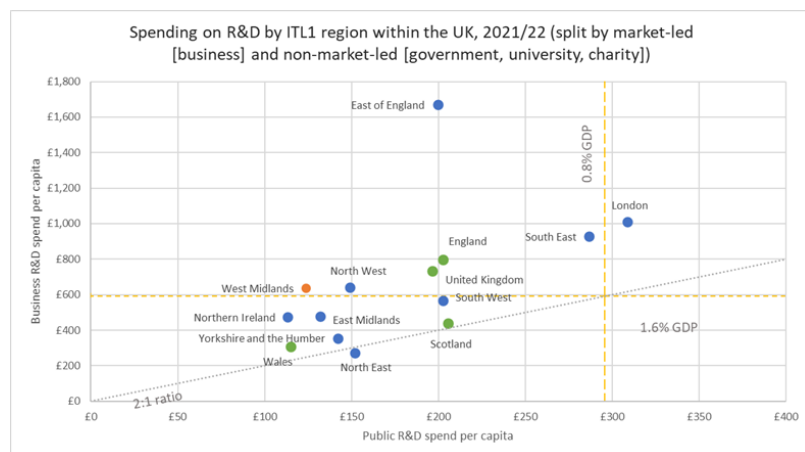
1.1 April Editorial

Last month saw the release by the ONS of latest data on regional research and development (R&D) spending by businesses, with £49.9bn invested across the UK in 2022. This latest data underpins the focus of the West Midlands Innovation Board on two critical innovation areas for the region, our policy work with Government and the broadening of the innovation bandwidth within the region.

Business spend on research and development is a critical driver for the regional innovation ecosystem because it drives higher-value processes and products which contribute to regional economic growth with two associated benefits; first R&D activity within the region significantly improves the chances of 'sticky' growth while second, the critical mass of R&D creates spillover benefits as new technologies are applied to emerging challenges in different sectors.

Businesses in the ITL1 West Midlands region spent an estimated £3.8bn in 2022 on R&D (or £637 per person living in our region). Over a similar timeframe, public spending of £0.7bn in our region means the West Midlands continues to have a high ratio of private to public investment (now 5.1:1). This confirms that the West Midlands remains remarkably efficient at using public investment to lever private activity - an important strategic reference point that myself, University Vice-Chancellors, and the Mayor highlight in the ongoing Strategic Innovation Partnership discussions with the Science Minister, our bilateral "West Midlands Action Plan" work with Innovate UK and we amplify to the world in the 'Tech that Makes Tomorrow' campaign.

The Innovation Board has already identified that the region's business R&D has historically been deep-but-narrow. We will continue to maintain our competitive advantage in automotive and aerospace technologies, but increasingly have championed efforts to stimulate new emerging clusters (Cleantech, Medtech/Health Tech, Creative Industries) by diversifying public and private R&D through activities like the £33m Innovation Accelerator, the new West Midlands Investment Zone, and partnership with Plug and Play UK.



The graph compares R&D spend per capita across regions/countries. The West Midlands region has the second highest private to public R&D spend ratio in the UK (5.1:1).

Mike Wright
Chair, West Midlands Innovation Board

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1.2 Coming Up in the Month Ahead

- [Business insights and impact on the UK economy](#) – 4 April
- [Labour market in the regions of the UK](#) – 16 April
- [16 to 18 schools & college performance data in England / A level & other 16-18 results](#) – 18 April
- [Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators](#) – 25 April

1.3 National Headlines

- Inflation falls to 2.5-year low
- Ernst and Young warns UK regional economic growth gap to widen
- Centre for Cities urges UK Government commitment to fiscal devolution
- UK Government announces budget for 2024/25

[Inflation falls to 2.5-year low](#)

The Consumer Prices Index fell to 3.4% in February [according to the ONS](#). This latest fall has renewed speculation that the Bank of England will start to reduce rates in May this year. Falling rates could provide much-needed stimulus to the economy.

[Ernst and Young warns UK regional economic growth gap to widen](#)

The [EY Regional Economic Forecast](#) predicts a return of economic momentum across the UK from 2024 to 2027, with London and the South East outpacing the national average in GVA growth. Employment is set to rise annually by 1.1% nationally, with London, the South East, and the South West exceeding this rate. Despite efforts to address regional economic disparities, London and the South East are forecasted to account for 40% of the UK's GVA by 2027. The report highlights challenges such as post-pandemic labour market inactivity and regional imbalances in industrial sector composition. Recommendations include tailored growth plans, infrastructure investment, and reskilling initiatives. With reference to the West Midlands, the report notes that the region was the fastest growing in 2023, achieving growth of 0.6%, largely driven by the region's manufacturing sectors. Although the region had the fastest growth last year, it is London (2.1%) and the Southeast (2%) that are forecast to see the fastest GVA growth between 2024-27, compared to 1.7% in the West Midlands.

[Centre for Cities urges UK Government commitment to fiscal devolution](#)

The [Centre for Cities calls for a shift](#) towards a fairer model redistributing local revenues. While complex, fiscal devolution promises economic benefits without straining fiscal capacity. Advocates urge the Chancellor to prioritize this agenda, recognizing its potential to drive growth and alleviate local funding crises. Though not an immediate solution, committing to fiscal devolution sets a crucial foundation for future economic strategies.

[UK Government announces budget for 2024/25](#)

Highlights from this budget included a reduction in the rate of national insurance by 2p, affecting those in work and £1 billion in new tax reliefs for the **UK's creative industries**. This includes a 40% relief from business rates for eligible film studios in England for 10 years and the introduction of [UK Independent Film Tax Credit](#), which comes as the [WMCA seeks to drive forward the region's creative sector](#) and production in Digbeth. For a further readout of announcements see section [2.1](#).

1.4 Regional Headlines

- Local and mayoral elections to take place on 2 May
- Midlands Rail Hub works set to begin
- Business Commission West Midlands publishes final report
- Police and Crime Commissioner powers not to be transferred to WMCA Mayor on 2 May

[Local and mayoral elections to take place on 2 May](#)

People will go to the polls on Thursday, 2 May, to elect the mayor for the region alongside councillors to local authorities in Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

[Midlands Rail Hub works set to begin](#)

A new £123m Midlands Rail Hub will [kickstart a transformative upgrade](#) project to enhance rail services across the Midlands. This funding, reallocated from HS2, will facilitate infrastructure improvements and increased train frequency, benefiting over 50 stations and 7 million people. The project, part of the government's broader Network North plan, aims to boost connectivity and capacity, with plans for additional services and station upgrades. The investment underscores the government's commitment to regional transport development, aligning with other initiatives like the Midlands Engine Investment Fund II and increased funding for local transport connections.

[Business Commission West Midlands publishes final report](#)

The Business Commission West Midlands' final [report](#) outlines strategies for regional business growth amid geopolitical tensions, post-Covid challenges, and energy crises. It advocates for streamlined public funding structures, urgency in addressing growth impediments, and support for businesses at all stages. The report, comprising over 90 recommendations, emphasizes collaboration among local, regional, and national authorities. It aims to attract new businesses while nurturing existing ones through enhanced infrastructure and support systems. Acknowledging the importance of time in implementing changes, it pledges continued engagement with stakeholders to drive economic growth and prosperity in the region.

[Police and Crime Commissioner powers not to be transferred to WMCA Mayor on 2 May](#)

On 18 March, the High Court ruled that the Home Office did not provide sufficient information when consulting on the transfer. [This ruling was upheld on appeal](#). This means that on May 2nd, residents of the West Midlands will vote for a Mayor and a Police and Crime Commissioner separately, rather than the combined role as proposed by the Home Office.

2.0 In More Depth

2.1 National Roundup

Spring Budget 2024

The following summarises some of the key Spring Budget announcements of relevance to the West Midlands Combined Authority and wider region. The full Budget document is available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk).

Key announcements for the region

- Additional '[Level 4' devolution commitments](#) for the WMCA.
- An [additional annex](#) to the single settlement memorandum of understanding, which adds further detail on the single settlement outcomes framework, allocation formulae, net zero function and spending controls.
- Details published on the [West Midlands Investment Zone](#), alongside publication of the [Investment Opportunity Fund](#) prospectus inviting bids of up to £25 million for private investment in Investment Zones and Freeports.
- £15 million announced for the WMCA to support culture, heritage and inward investment, of which £10 million is to support culture and heritage projects and £5 million is for inward investment.
- £100 million for culture projects in "levelling up" areas nationally, with Coventry and Redditch namechecked in the Chancellor's statement.
- Expansion of the Long-Term Plan for Towns to twenty additional areas, including Sutton Coldfield. The Plan provides places with ten years of endowment-style funding and support worth up to £20 million to invest in regeneration initiatives.
- Government support for the UK's bid to host the 2027 Invictus Games in Birmingham, with £26 million underwrite to enable the bid.
- A name-check for the WMCA's [Business Energy Advice Service](#).
- A "[Level 2" devolution deal](#) for Warwickshire County Council, including, for example, devolution of the Adult Education Budget.

Key national announcements

- Further details confirmed on the £4.5 billion announced at the Autumn Statement to unlock investment in strategic manufacturing sectors. The package will include over £2 billion for the automotive industry and £975 million for aerospace, and further measures to support advanced manufacturing, including a £50 million Apprenticeship Growth Sector pilot.
- A permanent extension of tax relief for theatres, orchestras, museums, and galleries introduced during the pandemic.
- A six-month extension to the Household Support Fund.
- The launch of the [Public Service Productivity Plan](#), with £800 million of investment.
- A "[Level 4" devolution deal](#) for the North East potentially worth over £100 million, including a new Growth Zone.

The Productivity Institute warns public sector productivity growth plans should focus on long-term development over short-term gains

The Chancellor's budget emphasizes doubling efficiency gains in the public sector to reduce the deficit responsibly. According to [the piece](#), while productivity growth is crucial, rushing for quick results risks pushing already strained public sector organizations to collapse. Although some sectors like healthcare and education have shown productivity gains, there's concern over levelling off and the pandemic's impact. The government's new program aims to improve public sector productivity, leveraging technology and sharing best practices. Yet, sustained progress requires a long-term strategic approach, prioritizing innovation over short-term gains to ensure efficient public service delivery without compromising quality.

[Goldman Sachs publishes "Generation Growth: The Small Business Manifesto"](#)

The [Manifesto](#) highlights the potential of UK small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in boosting the economy. A survey conducted by Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program identified areas for government intervention, such as upskilling the workforce, potentially unlocking £106 billion in revenue and 88,000 jobs. While SMEs are optimistic, they seek government support for talent acquisition, access to finance, late payment legislation, climate change adaptation, and AI integration. They also advocate for a voice in policymaking, stable policies, and infrastructure improvements.

[British Business Bank releases Small Business Finance Markets report](#)

The [report](#), now in its tenth year, analyses the evolution of small business finance from 2014 to 2023. It notes growth in debt and equity finance providers but highlights challenges in specific regions and for certain demographics. Key findings include increased support amid economic shocks, changes in lending landscapes, and maturity in equity markets. Challenges persist in regional equity financing and support for female- and ethnic-minority-owned businesses. While asset finance increased in 2023, bank lending and equity finance declined. On a positive note for the region, the West Midlands was the only part of the UK to see an increasing proportion of smaller businesses using external finance since 2019.

[Demos releases Good Credit Index briefing paper](#)

According to [research](#) by Demos, financial inequality and access to credit by consumers in the UK has been worsened by the cost-of-living crisis, increasing 'credit deserts' (including around Birmingham), with many being caught in bad credit cycles. The most recent paper by Demos proposes various policy options to enhance consumer access to and supply of good credit, stressing the need for coordinated implementation. For instance, regulating high-cost credit without improving access to good credit could worsen consumer situations. It suggests creating a new Financial Inclusion Strategy to address financial resilience, debt prevention, and education. Recommendations include aligning consumer protections across lending markets, regulating "buy now, pay later" schemes, reforming credit scoring, clarifying regulations to reduce lender risk aversion, enacting a Fair Banking Act, expanding credit unions, and implementing local referral strategies.

[The Productivity Institute reviews accountability in English devolution](#)

The [report](#) examines four types of accountability in English devolution: top-down, bottom-up, inward, and outward. Top-down accountability describes the way in which local authorities and combined authorities answer to central government. Bottom-up accountability flows the other way. Inward accountability is the set of processes that operate within and between local institutions to ensure that they function effectively. Outward accountability refers to the way in which political institutions are responsive to, and acquire legitimacy from, citizens and civil society. The report identifies limitations in inward and outward accountability among combined authorities. Recommendations include redesigning scrutiny functions, offering governance options for Combined Authorities, reverting to the supplementary vote model for mayoral elections, and revitalizing local media.

[Academics urge foundational rethink of subnational governance in the UK](#)

The concept of "levelling up" in UK politics encompasses various meanings, focusing on reducing inequalities between regions and improving outcomes overall. Challenges arise due to England's governance structures, hindering effective policy implementation. These constraints, including income inequality and uneven growth trajectories, require tailored interventions at the local level. However, England's centralized governance, dominated by Westminster, limits regional autonomy. The [paper](#), written by some of the West Midlands' leading academics, suggests restructuring governance to empower local actors in addressing socioeconomic challenges effectively. It highlights the need for a foundational rethink to enable long-term, place-based strategies backed by enhanced subregional policy capabilities.

UK Government introduces draft Rail Reform Bill

The [bill](#) proposes the establishment of Great British Railways (GBR), merging infrastructure and service management to enhance efficiency and accountability. GBR aims to improve passenger experiences, promote innovation, and boost rail freight. Pre-legislative scrutiny will refine the bill, with a focus on integration, efficiency, and customer-centric approaches. The reforms prioritize collaboration with the private sector and align with public consultation responses. This comprehensive overhaul seeks to create a simpler, customer-focused, and financially sustainable railway system for the future.

Urban Transport Group releases report on the state of transport 2024

The new [report](#) highlights the challenges facing public transport in English city regions, exacerbated by the pandemic. Despite some optimism around recovery and devolution, the report reveals declining trends, including fewer overall trips and decreased rail and bus usage (including in the West Midlands). Car travel remains dominant. Through the report, the Urban Transport Group emphasizes the need for long-term recovery strategies, clarity on funding, and recognition of public transport's value to communities.

The Productivity Institute reviews the crucial role of workplace trust in improving productivity

Studies reveal trust's significant impact on organizational performance, with up to 18% of productivity variance attributed to trust during the pandemic. However, UK-based organizations struggle with trust, affecting top-down and bottom-up relationships. The [review](#) suggests that building trust requires consistent modelling of organizational values, accountability, flexibility, soft skills training for leaders, empowerment of employees, and active listening. Prioritizing trust fosters productivity, agility, and resilience, benefiting shareholders, employees, and organizational ecosystems.

The Centre for Social Justice delves into the issue of 'affordable' homes

The [paper](#) examines the concerns of England's least well-off households about housing quality, affordability, and security, highlighting the dissatisfaction with government-defined "affordable housing." It scrutinizes the shift towards "Affordable Rent" tied to market rates rather than incomes, leading to challenges, especially in high-cost areas. Major city authorities propose income-linked housing, termed "Living Rent," supported by public opinion. The paper also discusses fiscal implications and specialist housing models like employer-provided and stepping stone housing, advocating for policy support despite regulatory hurdles.

Climate Change Committee releases Independent Assessment of the Third National Adaptation Programme

The Climate Change Committee's [briefing](#) evaluates the Third National Adaptation Programme (NAP3), addressing the urgent need for resilience to climate change. Highlighting global temperatures exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, it criticizes NAP3 for lacking ambition and pace in tackling climate risks. While acknowledging NAP3 as an improvement, it emphasizes the need for urgent reform, including better governance, investment, and monitoring. The UK must refresh NAP3 in the new Parliament, integrating adaptation into policymaking across all sectors. The briefing urges learning from international best practices and emphasizes the importance of a robust monitoring and evaluation system for assessing progress. The WMCA is developing an Adaptation Plan to incorporate climate impacts into policy. In 2024, the Plan will be used for Adaptation Reporting Power Round 4. The WMCA acknowledges the need for unified action on climate risks, advocating for funding and a regional approach aligned with national recommendations.

The Productivity Institute considers whether part-time work is a lifeline or life sentence for women

The [piece](#) notes that part-time work offers a lifeline for women balancing work and caregiving, but it poses challenges. While 'retention-type' part-time jobs (those aimed at staff having children) benefit skilled workers, service roles lack flexibility, affecting productivity and women's opportunities. Challenges include limited access to flexible working rights and stalled career progression. UK women also face barriers to full-time employment, such as childcare costs and debt repayment policies.

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Improving part-time work involves prioritizing worker well-being, offering predictable schedules, challenging stereotypes, and integrating part-time roles into career paths. Sustainable growth requires policies ensuring decent conditions and skills development for part-time workers.

UK Insecure Work Index 2024 published by the Work Foundation

Job security for the UK workforce has been changing over the past few years, with 21% of the labour market now in insecure work. Since 2022, there has been a 44% decrease in secure work, a 34% increase in insecure work, and a 21% increase in severe insecure work. Women are 2.3 times more likely than men to be in severely insecure jobs, and young, disabled and ethnic minority workers are also more vulnerable. The [report](#) recommends an Employment Bill that will reduce insecure work through improved employee rights and protections, guaranteed minimum working hours and introducing flexible working as a day one right. The report underscores the importance of addressing insecure work and improving employment conditions to promote economic resilience, social-wellbeing and inclusivity.

Institute for the Future of Work considers the changing UK labour market

This [report](#) analyses the impact of skills changes in the UK economy in light of technological advances such as robotics and automation, advocating for models that weight demand side over supply. 93% of surveyed businesses (1000 firms) report having IT skills gaps with 42% attributing it to the fast pace of technological progress. Demand for high level technology skills – such as AI, cybersecurity and cloud solutions – is increasing, with less demand for basic digital skills. There are huge differences in pace of skills change across occupations too with demand for interpersonal skills, including communication and effective management, enduring. It concludes with a need for continued focus on providers delivering provision aligned to employer demand in growth sectors as well as up/re-skilling, placing importance on reviewing educational programmes to best equip future workers with the most relevant skills but also provide ongoing support for transitioning workers.

2.2 Regional Roundup

Labour force headlines

Labour Force Survey (LFS) results for February 2024 scheduled for release on 12th March were postponed to April (e.g. employment, unemployment, economic activity). An issue was detected in the weighting of the LFS for Northern Ireland. As a result, all LFS subnational data releases have been put on hold until next month. In the meantime, claimant counts are still available.

Claimant counts

Latest data showed the total claimant count rose by 5.2% in the WMCA area on the year to February 2023 (UK: 5.7%). The number of claimants as a proportion of residents aged 16–64 was 6.9% compared to 3.8% for the UK in February. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rate, Greater Manchester had the second highest rate at 5.1% down to 2.8% for the West of England.

Latest data showed the youth claimant count rose by 12.7% in the WMCA area on the year to February 2023 (UK: 8.0%). The number of youth claimants as a proportion of residents aged 18–24 was 8.8% compared to 5.1% for the UK in February. Across the Combined Authorities, the WMCA had the highest rate, Tees Valley was the second highest at 8.0% down to 2.6% for the West of England.

KPMG: UK Reports on Jobs – Midlands

The [report](#) summarises the latest job data for the Midlands region based on survey responses from over 100 recruitment agencies. Of the four English regions, the Midlands was identified as the best performer over the last three months, having the smallest reduction in permanent staff appointments in comparison and being the only region to see temporary billings growth from the employment of short-term staff in February. Temporary vacancies rose at the strongest rate for 6 months, continuing the 40 successive months where there has been a high demand for temporary staff. Permanent and temporary pay growth eased with signs of slowing down. Pay rates for temporary work rose again across the Midlands but also saw the slowest rise in hourly pay rates of the four regions.

West Midlands becomes first English region to speed-up tech-led bowel cancer screening

The West Midlands is [pioneering bowel cancer screening](#) using innovative 'pill cam' technology, available in local pharmacies and community settings, aiming to reduce waiting times from 30 weeks to just two, benefiting 2,000 individuals in its first year. Led by the WMCA, the £10 million Levelling Up Smart City Region program aims to revolutionize healthcare delivery, aligned with NHS productivity plans. Partnering with WM5G and Corporate Health International, the program expands preventive, monitoring, and hospital services, aiming for earlier diagnoses and enhanced patient outcomes.

Midlands Engine releases report on aerospace in the Midlands

The [report](#) shows previous research has underestimated the size and impact of the Midland's aerospace cluster, reporting 20,000 aerospace jobs in the region, across 180 companies and at 225 sites. New data, however, reveals that the Midlands is home to 36,500 aerospace jobs across 524 companies and at 595 sites. To fully understand the scale and economic outputs of the industry, there is a need for more aerospace research, development and funding. Although the industry receives 41% of national R&D grants, these tend to be concentrated, with 94% of 'flying parts' makers receiving no funding at all. Flying part makers make up around 33% of aerospace jobs, most of which are highly skilled and well-paid. Redistributing R&D funding would help reach these companies with untapped potential and increase the number of skilled employees and boost salaries in the region.

2.3 Regional Business Roundup¹

[New fund launched to enhance business investment](#)

The Midlands Engine Investment Fund II [has launched](#) with £400 million to support small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in the Midlands. Building on the success of its predecessor, it aims to create jobs and boost productivity. The fund offers loans ranging from £25,000 to £2 million and equity investments up to £5 million. Managed by five fund managers, it targets firms at various stages, from startups to established enterprises. The initiative, backed by the British Business Bank, aims to replicate past successes and drive economic growth across the region.

[West Midlands delegation to attend UK's biggest real estate conference for the first time in 2024](#)

The West Midlands [will participate in the UK Real Estate and Infrastructure Investment Forum](#) (UKREiIF) for the first time, showcasing investment opportunities worth over £20 billion from Birmingham, Coventry, Warwickshire, and other areas. Led by the West Midlands Growth Company, the delegation aims to highlight transformative development projects like the Coventry & Warwickshire Gigapark and Birmingham Knowledge Quarter. Discussions will focus on topics such as "Levelling Up" and brownfield development, fostering collaboration and growth in the region.

[West Midlands Business remain upbeat](#)

Latest data from the NatWest Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) shows that businesses in the region remain broadly positive. Data from HMRC also revealed the West Midlands continues to build on its exports – now at £34.9bn to the year ending December 2023. A trade deficit of £7.6bn remains but is decreasing. Since 2022, the West Midlands region goods exports increased by nearly £5.0bn (+16.6%) to £34.9bn in 2023, the joint highest percentage increase (with Northern Ireland) across the UK regions. Conversely, UK exports decreased by £8.7bn (-2.3%) to £365.7bn.

[Birmingham Airport sees boost in passengers](#)

Birmingham Airport was [used by 717,265 passengers during February](#). The figure was up 17% on the same month in 2023. During the month there were 2,632 departing flights and 2,639 arrivals. February also saw airline easyJet celebrate flying five million passengers to and from Birmingham Airport over the last 17 years.

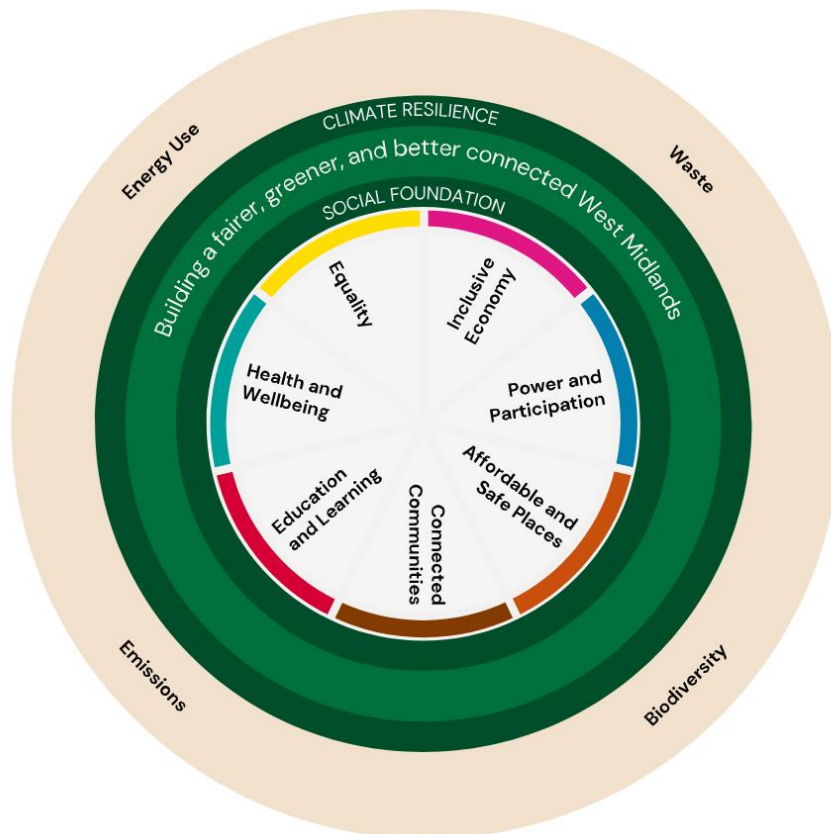
[Jaguar Land Rover invests further into the West Midlands](#)

Jaguar Land Rover has [created 250 West Midlands jobs](#) as it looks to develop its electric technology. New electrification engineers will be based at the Gaydon Engineering Centre and the company's £250m Future Energy Lab in Whitley, Coventry. £40m of technological innovations to test electric vehicles are hosted at the 323,000 sq ft lab, with drive units being created for JLR's electric Range Rover, Defender, Discovery and Jaguar models. More than 40 battery engineering roles are being recruited with the remaining roles across propulsion specialisms, such as software, system integration, component design and controls.

¹ See the [annex](#) for more business updates.

2.4 Inclusive Growth Roundup

This section looks at the regional news highlights which relate to our eight fundamentals of the [West Midlands Inclusive Growth fundamentals](#).



Climate Resilience

Midlands EV Boom still predicted

Midlands Connect [projects over 2 million electric cars \(EVs\) to be on our roads](#) by 2030, requiring nearly 59,000 new public charging points—a 969% increase. The research, unveiled at their EV Conference in March, forecasts a 1,899% increase in EV uptake by 2030. Midlands Connect aims to support Local Authorities in expanding EV infrastructure, partnering with them to secure government funding. CEO Maria Machancoses emphasizes collaboration to make the Midlands a hub for the green revolution.

Midlands Forest Network launched in Birmingham

[The Midlands Forest Network](#) (MFN), launched in Birmingham, aims to enhance woodland conservation and creation across the Midlands. Led by the Woodland Trust, National Forest Company, and Midlands Engine, with initial funding from Defra and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, it will connect landscapes, urban areas, and communities for ecological and economic benefits. The MFN project team plans to engage partners, host workshops, and share best practices to bolster woodland initiatives in the region. The WMCA's Forest Partnership Coordinator and Environment Team are working with the MFN to coordinate the current WMCA tree programme to enhance delivery outcomes for the region. The WMCA are undertaking iTree canopy and tree nursery studies, and have supplied a number of community tree giveaways with saplings in the 2023–24 planting season.

Inclusive economy

Centre of Social Justice releases report: Creating a Britain that Works and Cares

The [report](#) explores the ways in which carers can be supported to stay in work. In 2021/22, 400,000 carers had to leave their jobs to care for older or disabled family members, which costs the UK economy approximately £3.5 billion each year. A survey of 1,530 working-age carers revealed that 41% are contemplating exiting the workforce or reducing work hours due to caregiving demands, signalling a significant economic and personal toll; supporting family carers in their employment could

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potentially save the UK economy £6bn annually with 59% of full-time workers and 69% of part-time workers would return to work or increase their hours at work if they had the right support in place. The report makes a series of recommendations, including offering free home care to the people that carers are looking after, providing financial support for home adaptations, raising the carers allowance earning threshold, and mandating paid leave for carers in the workplace.

Affordable and safe places

[New police anti-corruption and abuse reporting service launched](#)

The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and National Police Chiefs' Council [launched an anti-corruption and abuse reporting service](#) in collaboration with Crimestoppers. It allows anonymous reporting of corruption and serious misconduct by police officers, staff, and volunteers nationwide. The service, available online and via phone, aims to build trust and accountability in law enforcement. Reports are assessed by specialist units for investigation or intervention, ensuring high standards of conduct. The initiative will allow West Midlands Police to take action against those who are not fit to serve.

Health and wellbeing

[Resolution Foundation delves into youth mental health](#)

A new [report](#) considers the increasing prevalence of mental health issues amongst young people and its impact on the economy. In 2022, 1 in 3 young people had a common mental health problem. The number of young people who are unable to work due to poor mental health has doubled in the last decade, and is now the leading cause for work absences. The impact of increasing mental health issues among young people is significant and multifaceted including decreased workforce productivity, higher rates of unemployment or underemployment, increased healthcare costs and social isolation.

Equality

[Department for Work and Pensions published the Buckland Review of Autism Employment](#)

This [review](#), launched last year, sought views from autistic people, employers and specialist groups on employer approaches to the recruitment, retention and development of autistic people. Only 3 in 10 working aged autistic disabled people are in employment, compared to 5 in 10 for all disabled people and 8 in 10 for non-disabled people. They face more barriers to obtaining work (e.g. unfair hiring) and staying in work (e.g. employers being unprepared and failing to have the necessary support in place). To address these issues there are a series of recommendations including: for more initiatives to raise awareness of autism to reduce its stigma and make workplaces more inclusive and accepting of neurodiverse conditions; employers need to review their recruitment practises to appropriately support autistic applications and encourage in-work progression through skills and developmental support.

2.5 Latest Blog Roundup

City-REDI

West Midlands Combined Authority Deeper Devolution Deal

The Deeper Devolution deal for the WMCA presents an opportunity to [discuss](#) longstanding challenges and inequalities by providing resources, capacity, and responsibility previously centralized. However, collaboration with local partners is crucial for maximizing benefits and seizing key opportunities in tackling regional issues and promoting levelling up and inequality reduction.

Social Prescribing and Wellbeing Inequalities: Creating Conditions for Community-Driven Transformation of Health Care

The SPARC Network, which stands for Social Prescribing, Assets, and Relationships in Communities, is dedicated to advancing social prescribing through asset-based approaches, aiming to tackle health inequalities and foster a social model of wellbeing. They recently piloted a community of practice in East Birmingham to transform wellbeing disparities. Dr. Koen Bartels will [discuss](#) their action research approach, successes, and challenges, focusing on how communities of practice can benefit stakeholders and be integrated into existing relationships. Their insights will inform broader efforts to create asset-based ecosystems for social prescribing, promoting resilient and inclusive health and social care systems.

Not the Same: Why Definitions of Culture and Creativity Matter in Place-Based Policymaking

The UK's prioritization of creative industries in the 2023 Autumn Statement underscores the importance of understanding the nuances within the creative and cultural landscape for regional policymaking. This piece aims to distinguish between 'cultural' and 'creative' sectors, [highlighting](#) how a narrow understanding can marginalize other forms of value associated with cultural activity. It warns against over-reliance on economic measurements, which may perpetuate uneven funding structures and undervalue diverse cultural contributions.

EVs and Charging Infrastructure

Dr Magda Cepeda-Zorrilla investigates and [discusses](#) the adoption of electric vehicles in the UK alongside Government plans for net zero, and the challenges that the owners of electric vehicles face.

The Local Policy Innovation Partnership: A Reflection on the Launch Event

Rebecca Riley looks back at the launch of the Local Policy Innovation Partnership (LPIP) in Central London and [discusses](#) a summary of the emerging themes from the post-event sessions and details on the 4 new partnerships.

Developing a Business Case: Introduction to the Financial, Commercial and Managerial Cases

Alice Pugh [discusses](#) the importance of having financial, commercial and managerial cases when raising a business case.

The Spring Statement: The Impact

Alice Pugh looks at the [impact's](#) cuts to National Insurance Contributions, raising the high-income child benefit charge, and public spending will have on households in the UK.

The West Midlands Insights on Society and Economy (WISE) newsletter is a monthly publication by the West Midlands Combined Authority that sets out the social and economic trends that matter to the West Midlands. The newsletter contributes to our understanding of the economic conditions of the West Midlands, as part of the wider regional research and intelligence ecosystem. Further information is available on the West Midlands research and insights website at wmca.org.uk/research and previous issues are available at wmca.org.uk/wise.

This edition was prepared by Phillip Nelson, Victoria Tidy, and Tawfieg Zakria, and incorporates commissioned content from the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) and evidence from the City-Region Economic Development Institute (City-REDI) at the University of Birmingham and other regional partners.