

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date	Wednesday 27 th March 2024
Report title	WMCA Activity – Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Portfolio Lead	N/A
Accountable Chief Executive	Laura Shoaf – Chief Executive, WMCA.
Accountable Employee	James Hughes - Member Relationship Manager, WMCA
Report has been considered by	Executive Board, WMCA

Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee of Dudley MBC is recommended to:

- (1) Note the report which details the work that the West Midlands Combined Authority is carrying out in the Dudley MBC Local Authority Area.
- (2) Make any recommendations to Dudley MBC or West Midlands Combined Authority Officers on matters in this report for consideration.
- (3) Set out the frequency of updates from the West Midlands Combined Authority to both the Scrutiny Board and any other Member bodies within the Local Authority.

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report seeks to set out the work that the West Midlands Combined Authority is carrying out within the Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Area.
- 1.2. The report covers key directorates activity including skills, economy, strategy, transport, net zero, housing and health and communities.

- 1.3. The West Midlands Combined Authority recognises the role that the Borough plays in supporting the Combined Authority to deliver for the West Midlands Region.
- 1.4. The West Midlands Combined Authority is seeking to improve the engagement with the Constituent Authorities, and this report will be the first update in a series, of which the frequency is to be determined by the Board.
- 1.5. To date the West Midlands Combined Authority has either facilitated or influenced £514 million worth of investments in the Dudley MBC area. This equates to £1,608 per head.

2. Transport

2.1. Overreaching Priorities

- 2.1.1. Priorities are improving the reliability of public transport services, ensuring the continuation of bus routes in light of funding pressures, completing rail and metro infrastructure delivery, improving access by walking and cycling through improved infrastructure for the region and ensuring the road network operates safely, efficiently, and reliably.
- 2.1.2. Supporting the delivery of innovative transport solutions across the West Midlands.
- 2.1.3. The emerging programme of investment through CRSTS and long-term planning for the Single Settlement through the Local Transport Plan (LTP) and other policies will help to deliver a better connected, greener West Midlands.

2.2. Strategic Update

2.2.1. HS2 & Network North

- In October 2023 Government announced the cancellation of HS2 north of the West Midlands with immediate effect. The key points from the announcement were:
 - ❖ HS2 Phase1 will be completed in full:
 - Both Euston (Central London) and Old Oak Common (Elizabeth Line connections) to the West Midlands stations at Interchange (NEC/Airport/Arden Cross) and Curzon St as well as to the junction with the West Coast Main Line at Handsacre (north of Lichfield)
 - ❖ The other proposed sections of HS2 will be scrapped with immediate effect:
 - HS2 Phase 2a (Handsacre to Crewe), HS2 Phase 2b (Crewe to Manchester), HS2 East (West Midlands to East Midlands Parkway and Midland Main Line)
 - ❖ Detailed work is underway to understand the impact of this decision on service patterns and frequencies on both the Phase 1 HS2 network and the existing conventional network.
 - ❖ The Mayors of WMCA and GMCA have announced a joint intention to improve connections between the West Midlands

and Greater Manchester, despite the cancellation of HS2 Phase 2. Work on an outline business case has already started.

- ❖ Due to the cancellation of HS2 Phase 2, £19.8bn have been reallocated to transport investments in the North, while £6.5bn are reallocated to the Midlands. As part of this, WMCA the indicative amount for CRSTS2 has increased by just over £1bn, from £1.566bn to £2.648bn. This is for the five-year period from 2027/28 to 2031/32.
- ❖ An additional £100m were announced by the Prime Minister as part of CRSTS1 to support the delivery of existing Metro extensions. These extensions are Wednesbury-Brierley Hill, Birmingham East Side Extension and Arden Cross as part of the HS2 station.
- ❖ The Network North proposals include building Midlands Rail Hub in full and this has had £1.75bn allocated to it. The project will be subject to full business case, planning and Transport & Works Act Order approvals. Due to the cancellation of HS2 East, it is expected that the West to East Midlands part of MRH will revert to delivering service enhancements to Tamworth, Derby, and Nottingham as well as to Nuneaton and Leicester.

2.3. Local Transport Plan Update

- 2.3.1. Developing the LTP is a statutory requirement and the responsibility for the WMCA.
- 2.3.2. The new LTP is called “Reimagining Transport in the West Midlands” and will be comprised of multiple parts including the Core Strategy, 6 Big Moves, 4 Area Strategies, and an Implementation Plan.
- 2.3.3. It sets out a high ambition for change in the transport system, with an emphasis on increasing public transport, walking, and cycling. It also embraces many positive changes which provide benefits for car users, including supporting zero emissions.
- 2.3.4. 6 Big Move strategies have also been approved by the CA Board, following consultation took place on drafts in 2023. These set out more detailed policies: Behaviour Change, Accessible & Inclusive Places, Walk, Wheel, Cycle and Scoot, Public Transport & Shared Mobility, A Safe, Efficient and Reliable Network, A Green Transport Revolution.
- 2.3.5. WMCA Board also committed WMCA and local authorities to collaborate on developing the four LTP Area Strategies (for Birmingham, Black Country, Coventry, and Solihull) which will set out and assess the impact of local proposals across the West Midlands. TfWM officers have worked closely with teams from Dudley and the Black Country over the last year on pulling the strategies together. The approach taken to develop the Area Strategies will also support with

the development of the future pipeline of schemes which will be delivered from 2027 onwards as part of CRSTS2/Single Settlement.

- 2.3.6. The single Implementation Plan will detail local proposals across the West Midlands including existing local priorities including projects currently funded for development through funds such as CRSTS, Active Travel Funds, and Towns Fund, as well as cross-cutting regional proposals. Details such as funding estimate, funding allocations, development stage, timelines, and the approach to developing the pipeline will be set out in the Implementation Plan.

2.4. Funding

- 2.4.1. In early February 2024, WMCA agreed the budget for 2024/25, which includes an indicative capital spending programme totalling £706.8m for that financial year.
- 2.4.2. The transport delivery budget for 2024/25 was approved at £198.3m, comprised of £119.4m from the transport levy (a 3.0% increase was not approved), £73.9m of grant income, and £5m windfall gains from treasury management.
- 2.4.3. TfWM has secured protection for existing bus network services until December 2024. Approximately £40m of the transformational BSIP will be repurposed to support the network. TfWM has secured formal agreements with operators to ensure value for money.
- 2.4.4. TfWM has also reported several cost and inflationary pressures to WMCA Board throughout 2023. DfT has permitted a one-off CRSTS re-baselining exercise for all MCA area. A TfWM Change Control and Rebasing request was submitted to DfT in late September and was approved by WMCA Board in January 2024.
- 2.4.5. WMCA are providing Dudley MBC with additional pothole funding for 2023/34 of £481,772, this is additional to highway maintenance and LNIP funding.
- 2.4.6. The WMCA's Single Settlement with the government may provide additional opportunities for funding from 2025/26 onwards.

2.5. Network Performance and Reliability

- 2.5.1. Bus services accommodate more than 4 million passenger journeys each week, but we have seen the region lose 12% of bus services between 2020 and October 2023.
- 2.5.2. Performance has seen improvements but does remain challenging for passengers. There have been driver shortages and, in 2023, services were severely impacted by strikes within National Express, with network performance being impacted in the run-up to this action. Operators have also experienced reduced patronage, reduced revenue, and a significant increase in costs.

- 2.5.3. Rail industrial action continues to feature. It has impacted performance and slowed the roll out of planned improvements. While issues with RMT have been resolved, progress in resolving dispute with ASLEF remain unclear.
- 2.5.4. The Regional Transport Coordination Centre (RTCC) continues to liaise closely with Dudley MBC and the Black Country UTC to make them aware of incidents that occur on the network and will likely have an impact on network operations and performance. The team ensure a multi-modal overview is provided to stakeholders and ensure that customer communication is coordinated and informed.
- 2.5.5. The Events & Emergency Planning team has integrated itself within Dudley MBC's event planning structure. This ensures that transport considerations are coordinated, and importantly supports our customers and spectators transport experience.

2.6. Bus Policy Delivery Options and Enhanced Partnership

- 2.6.1. TfWM has commissioned an independent assessment for future bus policy delivery options. This commission includes detailed options including a full franchise assessment. Work is ongoing and is scheduled to report to WMCA Board for a decision on how to proceed in summer 2024.
- 2.6.2. TfWM have worked closely with operators and local districts to create the 2nd Enhanced Partnership (EP) in the country. The EP covers the vehicle types, branding, payment options, on-board facilities and technology, journey time performance and which stops the bus service uses.
- 2.6.3. Variation 003 was made in September 2023 and expanded to include BSIP delivery. The areas covered by the Solihull AQPS and Wolverhampton AQPS were absorbed into the EP Scheme.

2.7. Road Safety

- 2.7.1. An updated regional road safety strategy has been approved by WMCA Board and an updated action plan is being developed. Formal consultation on the action plan will occur in February/March 2024.
- 2.7.2. The main themes of this refreshed strategy are to adopt a "Safe Systems approach" for: Safe road users, Safe vehicles, Safe speeds, Safe roads and mobility, Post-crash response.
- 2.7.3. In line with the LTP, the draft revised strategy includes a new target of a 50% reduction in the number of people Killed and Seriously Injured (KSIs) by 2030.
- 2.7.4. The refreshed strategy has been informed by valuable contributions of Dudley officers through attendance at the face-to-face road safety away days and receipt of written feedback.

2.8. Net Zero

- 2.8.1. Through Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA), WMCA was awarded £29m from DfT to deliver 100 hydrogen powered buses and associated infrastructure plus 24 articulated electric buses for Sprint bus rapid transit routes. The project will deliver 100 hydrogen fuel cell buses and refuelling infrastructure as well as 24 battery electric articulated buses and charging infrastructure, subject to a business case review by the main partner National Express which is nearing completion. TfWM has also supported the region's second biggest operator, Diamond, in bidding for further ZEBRA 2 funding to support procurement of 14 buses, their first major step to electrifying their fleet.
- 2.8.2. Significant work is underway on updating the West Midlands ULEV and EV strategy to better align with the new LTP objectives. The refreshed Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy is expected to be finalised in mid-2024 and will set out new targets for charging infrastructure. TfWM is working with partners on delivering various types of EV infrastructure inclusively across the region through the CRSTS programme, government grants and collaboration with the private sector. WMCA is working closely with BC Transport team.

2.9. CRSTS Schemes

- 2.9.1. West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement sees the WMCA receive £1.05bn in funding for investment in sustainable transport. To facilitate the effective delivery of these schemes, the dedicated Delivery Directorate was created within TfWM in 2023.
- 2.9.2. Work on phase one of the Wednesbury-Brierley Hill Metro Extension (from Wednesbury to Flood Street in Dudley town centre) will be complete in late 2024, following all safety checks, driver training, and the industry regulations satisfied as part of the safety into service, the route will then be open to the public. Some early works previously agreed for Phase 2 are nearing completion including essential maintenance works to Parkhill viaduct. Work on the updated Business Case, required as part of the additional funding from Government, on the extension beyond Dudley is underway.
- 2.9.3. Of this funding, £12m has been allocated to Coventry Very Light Rail (CVLR), based at the Very Light Rail National Innovation Centre in Dudley, which successfully ran on its test track for the first time in late 2023. This test run is leading up to a real-world demonstration of VLR in the streets of Coventry city centre.
- 2.9.4. £3m is allocated Stourbridge Town Centre Sustainable Connectivity Package, which includes active travel enhancements to improve safety and perception of safety. Delivery is expected to start in late 2024.

- 2.9.5. £20m is allocated to re-building Dudley Bus Station into Dudley Interchange, with improved connection to the Wednesbury to Brierly Hill Metro line which has a stop adjacent to this site. Delivery of this scheme is expected to be completed in Spring 2025.
- 2.9.6. TfWM will shortly commission support to undertake a study into transport improvements in the Walsall to Stourbridge corridor, considering how to connect Walsall to Wednesbury and Brierley Hill to Stourbridge building links to the WBHE metro being delivered. It is anticipated that this study will report later in 2024.

3. Skills, Health and Communities

3.1. Overarching Priorities

- 3.1.1. The WMCA has recently launched its Employment and Skills Strategy 2024-2027. The strategy seeks to build further on this success by setting out a vision for an integrated employment and skills system for the region, through which we can stimulate economic growth, deliver better outcomes for residents and businesses, and create healthier thriving communities. Over the next three years, we will continue our focus on four key pillars:
- Building strong and inclusive communities.
 - Providing a good education up to level 2.
 - Supporting residents into-employment and supporting career progression.
 - Meeting future skills needs at level 3 and above through upskilling and reskilling.
- 3.1.2. We will also invest in the development of an effective regional ecosystem for employment and skills, building the leadership capacity and capability to transform outcomes for residents, businesses, and the region.

3.2. UK Shared Prosperity Fund

- 3.2.1. The total allocation over the three-year programme (2022-2025) is £6,925,826.
- 3.2.2. We are currently in Year 2 of the allocation which sits at £2,173,400 (including a £110,000 management fee). This is split into Capital (£459,746) and Revenue (£1,603,654).
- 3.2.3. This has been split into pillars with projects sat under each pillar theme.
- Business Support Pillar Projects - Centrally designed within the Hub & Spoke Business Growth West Midlands model. WMCA manage grants programmes to provide a feed in of businesses to access the locally managed grants programmes.
 - ❖ SME Grants: £343,378 - WM SME Grants Programme aims to improve economic prosperity by stimulating business and

enterprise activity, improving business confidence, encouraging investment, upskilling, and creating local jobs. Grant funding of £2,500 to £100k with up to a 50:50 match should be offered to businesses.

- ❖ NZ Grants: £167,874 - Net Zero Grants aims at removing financial barriers and enabling SMEs to make carbon savings through increased energy and resource efficiency. Up to 50:50 matched grant funding of £2.5k - £7.5k for new business start-ups and £5k to £100k for established SMEs.
- ❖ Business Advisors: £460,800 - Business Growth West Midlands work closely with the locally funded Business Advisors to offer local business advice and support, with the main objective to reduce fragmentation and offer a consistent, unified, and standardised business support offer in the region in coordination with the local partners.
- Communities & Place Pillar Projects
 - ❖ Vibrant Town Centres and Places – £375,828 – Dudley Town Centre improvements and pilot project to develop a town centre partnership. Targeted support to retail and leisure businesses, increasing the diversity of use (vacant premises) and encouraging alternative uses within public spaces to increase vibrancy.
 - ❖ Community Capacity Building – £32,214 – Capacity building for community organisations through forums and workshops including bid writing and managing projects.
 - ❖ Destination Marketing – £80,535 – Promotion and marketing campaign for Dudley's local areas of historic interest, visitor attractions, and experiences to increase visitors and pride in place.
 - ❖ Cultural Heritage – £80,535 – Create and deliver a cultural strategy for the borough. Enable cultural activity and events via the promotion of spaces where events can be held and piloting a cultural calendar of events to improve the visitor experience.
 - ❖ Community Engagement – £236,235 – Pilot a consistent and community led participatory structure / structure for engagement and local democracy
 - ❖ Digital inclusion - £16,107 – Investment and support for digital connectivity in local community facilities.
 - ❖ Start-up Support - £161,069 - Start-up and growth support including incubation to improve the life chances of new

businesses. The budget will be used to commission start-up support appropriate to Dudley's needs.

- ❖ People & Skills development – £108,827 – Development work in preparation for year 3 people and skills delivery.

3.3. Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund

3.3.1. The total amount that has been awarded to Dudley Council for the full 2-year period is £801,714.28 which will be split over the 2 years, providing an annual award for financial years 2023/24 of £237,126.95 and 2024/25 of £564,587.33. The programme will deliver 5 projects within the Dudley area.

3.3.2. The targeted support offer will be delivered in Partnership with NHS and DMBC through the 'I can' project. This will include:

- Sector-based employment programmes for underrepresented group
- JD, Job Spec standardisation toolkits
- Liaising with HOS – vacancies, recruitment and campaigns, partnership work to support recruitment.
- Graduate pathway into professional roles, Career pathways and workforce planning
- Volunteer coordination & employment support for 'not job ready' and 'over 50's returners. Progression into WEX and employment support
- Social Value linked opportunities – work with employers and developers to engage and support residents into training and work opportunities.

3.3.3. The regional careers offer will work with Pre 16 and Post 16 cohorts that impacts NEET and Not known performance.

- Your Future – Your Choice initiative (Pre 16) for those at Risk of NEET (non-statutory cohort).
- Tracking and Follow-up (Fieldwork) to undertake home visitation for Not Known or disengaged NEET young people.
- Post 16 NEET 1-1 Support to access education, employment, and training
- SEND Employment Advisory work - analysis of NEET to develop a business case addressing identified employability needs requiring a broader or more specific offer.

3.3.4. Jobs and Skills hubs will be developed within deprived communities of Castle and Priory, Netherton, Woodside and St Andrews and Brierley Hill. The Hub will be a bespoke model of delivery with both statutory and community partners accessing and delivering within the "one-stop" approach.

- Access to digital

- Options for meeting with key professionals such as housing and CAB
 - Education and employers
 - Access to specialist VCS providers to meet with and support residents.
- 3.3.5. The Paid Work Placement model will offer 10 residents aged 18-29 years, furthest away from the labour market a bespoke work experience opportunity with local employers for a duration of 3 months - 16 hrs per week.
- Ongoing employability support – CV, Interview, presentation skills etc.
 - Enrolled into Gateway training as well as English and maths through Multiply.
- 3.3.6. The Mentoring support (Pre & Post 16 Support) project will support YP in achieving many outcomes and provide:
- 1 to 1 and Group Support
 - Winning Mentality programme
 - Educational Transition programmes
 - Counselling
 - Motivation & building confidence & self-esteem.
 - Managing behaviour and relationships,
 - Improving coping strategies

3.4. Multiply

- 3.4.1. Multiply offers financial literacy programmes to residents across the WMCA area. Total funding in Dudley, over 3 years, is £529,030. This is broken down by years as follows, Y1 –£62,800, Y2 - £233,115 and Y3 - £233,115.
- 3.4.2. The project is focussed on supporting residents with Financial Resilience & Family Finance.
- 3.4.3. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, in partnership with community organisations and Citizens Advice Bureau are delivering Multiply courses to employed residents across Dudley.
- 3.4.4. Dudley residents earn on average £589.20 per week for full time work which is significantly lower than the national average of £610.70. Through a blended offer of face to face and online learning, Dudley residents access the fully flexible financial resilience course and learn how to get their day-to-day costs down, understand credit, overdrafts and loans and how to use digital resources to manage budgets and financial commitments. Following the courses, residents have the opportunity to be referred for professional support or to progress onto further learning funded through Adult Education Budget.

- 3.4.5. The Family Finance course, aimed at employed residents on low incomes, is a 10-week programme which explores cutting costs and saving money. It focuses on participants gaining a generational change of attitude towards financial literacy where they learn how to cut costs and make everyday savings and how to become more sustainable to save the planet and the pennies.
- 3.4.6. Dudley residents can benefit from a package of support through accessing Multiply. Where residents are eligible, they receive digital support and devices through the Connected Services Fund. Supporting residents to increase both digital & numeracy skills increase opportunities for residents to access good work and has wider health and wellbeing benefits.
- 3.4.7. Delivered in the community as a time a place accessible to employed residents may be engaging with formal learning for the first time and the courses offer a chance for residents to gain a new level of confidence in an environment where they feel comfortable. Venues include libraries, schools, community centres and council locations. To ensure the success of the project, the content is linked to the very real needs of the Dudley residents to ensure they feel the value in participating.

3.5. Carers and Enterprise Company (CEC) Programme

3.5.1. Total funding allocation for the Academic Year (Sept 2023 - August 2024) is £69,969.

3.5.2. This is broken down to:

Funding Area	Funding Allocation Max	LA match Req	Phased Release
Coordinator Posts 1.5 inc provision for 1 FTE to be a Senior Post	£45 989	£45 989	Paid in arrears by claim over 4 periods
Local Hub Fund (based on £500 per institution with a signed MOU)	£15 000	0	Paid on termly profile subject to Delivery Plan approval and evidence of spend
Disadvantage (FSM) Uplift	£4 000	0	Paid on termly profile subject to Delivery Plan approval and evidence of spend
Teacher Encounters Fund	£4 980	0	Paid on termly profile subject to Delivery Plan approval and evidence of spend

- 3.5.3. The Local Hub Fund will enable all Hubs to improve careers provision in schools and colleges and as such allocation of spend and reflected in the LA Delivery Plan is:
- c30 % of fund to: Provide more high-quality experiences of the world of work for students
 - c30% of fund to: Amplify apprenticeships, technical and vocational routes
 - c30% of fund to: Target interventions for economically disadvantaged young people, those who face barriers, under-represented groups and those at risk of becoming NEET
 - c10% of fund to: Local Priorities
- 3.5.4. All schools and colleges complete a compass audit to measure themselves against the Gatsby benchmarks.
- 3.5.5. The eight Gatsby benchmarks serve as a framework for world class careers provision and have been adopted as part of the Government's Careers Strategy and are statutory guidance for schools and guidance for colleges. In addition, the Carers & Enterprise Company now supports the implementation of the benchmarks in education with a national network of support, resources and targeted funding.
- 3.5.6. The eight Gatsby benchmarks of good careers guidance are:
- A stable career programme,
 - Learning from careers and labour market information,
 - Addressing the need of each pupil
 - Linking curriculum to careers,
 - Encounters with employers and employees
 - Experiences of workplaces,
 - Encounters with further and higher education,
 - Personal guidance

3.6. Adult Education Budget

3.6.1. Labour Market/Residents Summary

- When looking at residents with no basic quals (i.e. holding none or just at entry/L1), Dudley sits at 27%, which is slightly lower than the wider WM (28%), but higher than the UK (22%).
- There are 9,040 claimants aged 16+. This represents 4.6% of claimants, which is slightly higher than the England average of 3.7%
- The number of people in Dudley who are economically inactive stands at 37,100 (a decrease of 1,300 since Jan 23) and of those, there's no data to outline how many of those do want to find work.

3.6.2. AEB Provision 2022/23

- At the end of the academic year in 2022/23, Dudley had received £7.87m AEB funding which represents 7% of the CA region.
- This funding is attributed to 4,500 learners undertaking 9,600 qualifications/courses.
- A total of 70 providers have delivered in Dudley with Dudley College delivering the bulk of training.
- Halesowen College, Dudley MBC, Wolverhampton & Telford College have all delivered significant training in Dudley during 2022/23.
- 2022/23 saw a significant increase in into employment programmes and skills bootcamps.
- Largest proportion of provision is a Level X and Level 2, although Entry and Level 2 have decreased.
- The largest proportion of delivery was in SSA14 (preparation for life and work). We decreased delivery in SSA5 (construction, planning and the built environment) and SSA14 when compared to 2021/22.
- Positive destinations (education or employment) in Dudley need to increase from 2021/22 to achieve the minimum of 65% positive progression.
- There are huge opportunities to flex and innovate delivery to meet the vacancy demands of Dudley.

3.6.3. AEB Provision 2023/24 To Date

- Dudley funding for 2023/24 at December 2023 is £2.71m, which is 7% of WMCA funding for this period.
- Dudley has had 2,715 Learners, and 4,305 Courses/Qualifications, this is 6% of the WMCA, which is slightly below 2022/23 which ended at 7%
- Into Employment programmes are currently at 8% of enrolments, at the same period in 2022/23 Into Employment programmes were at 9% of the enrolments for Dudley, so this is a slight improvement.
- ESOL & Functional Skills programmes are at 4% currently, which is slightly lower than this time in 2022/23 (5%).
- L4/L5 delivery has started to see an increase. To date, there have been 126 Enrolments which is 15% of 23/24 Enrolments. In the same period in 2022/23, it was 16%.
- Positive Destinations is currently at 30% (30% Employment, 8% Education)

3.7. Skills Bootcamps

- 3.7.1. Skills Bootcamps are a free, practical and engaging short course designed to equip residents with the knowledge and skills needed by employers across the region. Courses cover a variety of skills that are currently in-demand, they last up to 16 weeks and are fully funded.
- 3.7.2. The Courses cover logistics, retrofit (EV Charging, Installation skills, Heat Pump), Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering, Green Professionals (Net Zero), and Digital.
- 3.7.3. Dudley residents have benefitted from £698,400 of bootcamp funding across the last 2 years with a total of 287 learners undertaking a skills bootcamp.
- 3.7.4. Of that total, 122 learners have undertaken programmes in 2023/24 at a funding value of £290,500.

3.8. Free Courses For Jobs

- 3.8.1. People in the West Midlands earning £30,000 a year or less can take advantage of free Level 3 job-related training. A Level 3 qualification is equivalent to an advanced technical certificate or diploma, or two A levels.
- 3.8.2. The annual wage limit was agreed at £30,000 as this is the average salary in the West Midlands.
- 3.8.3. Improving the region's qualification levels is key to delivering the WMCA's ambitions for a healthier, happier, better connected and more prosperous West Midlands.
- 3.8.4. Recent research has shown that adults who boost their skills and gain new qualifications are more likely to be employed, earn more, and are less likely to need to claim benefits than those without.
- 3.8.5. Residents in Dudley accessed £614,400 of funding in 2022/23 and to date in 2023/24 have accessed £885,000. There is significant additional budget available for residents to benefit from.

3.9. Health & Communities

- 3.9.1. There are a number of schemes across the Local Authority area. These are detailed below:
 - £30k TfWM Active travel funding led by the Health and Communities Team to Active Black Country which led to co-funded Love Explore project which led to over 8,000 Black Country residents visiting local parks across the Black Country including local Dudley papers.
 - £150k into Active Black Country to work with the 4 Local Authorities and CVSs to pilot Black Country Moving (placed based community project) creating a network of community connectors including in Brierley Hill, St James and St Thomas, this pilot informed the successful Black Country Sport England bid for Commonwealth

Active Communities, working together to remove barriers and get more people active.

- ❖ This work is now going to be extended through an imminent £330k capacity grant to Active Black Country's CAC, now Place Based Partnership to strengthen stakeholder maturity, work with the community, get more people active and reduce inequalities plus a £80k to extend the monitoring, evaluation and learning plans across the 4 PbP.
- The WMCA also worked with Sport England and partners to assess the 3000 applications for CWG games equipment for which many Dudley community sport organisations are benefitting
- The Health and Communities team designed the sport, physical active and mental wellbeing criteria and grant thresholds for the CWG Legacy Inclusive Communities Fund for which over 1000 people have attended briefings and the results of the first successful applicants will be known very soon.
- The 3 other WMCA Sport England funded pilot projects – triage service to build the capacity of trusted organisations, testing the integration of physical activity as part of the mental health care pathway and extending the United by 2022 trailblazer sport volunteering project Gen 22 has the potential to benefit and impact on Dudley MBC and the WMCA will work with the Council to explore this.
- The WMCA is concluding a report to understand the barriers, good practice and enablers to get more people from the LGBTQ community area, this insight, similar to disabled people and sport work will help inform local planning and practice.
- £15k funding to lead on Dudley's element of the WMCA Feasibility Study as part of the submission to be one of DfT's social prescribing pilots. Although the bid was not successful, it has developed better awareness of social prescribing of walking and cycling initiatives.
- £73k TfWM Active travel funding led by Health and Communities team into Active Black Country charity to pilot work across the 4 Black Country authorities to get more people with health conditions prescribed to physical activity working with the Integrated care board and other providers in the area. This informed the work above and the impact of this project was to get more people walking, more prescribing of physical activity and improved mental health and wellbeing including better sleep.
- £80k budget generated including £40k from the WMCA for the Cycling Facilities Business Case, as one of the WM Mayor's priorities

and in response to the Halesowen Athletics and Cycling Club's campaigning. Ongoing discussions with Dudley MBC about potential benefit, impact and communications, with an option of next stage site feasibility study.

- £15k was granted to Dudley MBC to co-fund community insight to understand the actions to address the identified barriers identified through the delivery of Beat the Streets during the CWG games. This report has been used to inform the delivery of the Community Connectors and other investment. For the WMCA this report has been used for case making to change TfWM walking and cycling policy and practice.
- Funded Active Black Country to develop the evidence and provide the training to health professionals about the benefits of a physical health and activity conversation with disabled people to inform practice.
- 5 organisations from Dudley area are working to Include Me WM a pledge to be more inclusive in their programming and work with disabled people.
- The WMCA offers a workforce wellbeing programme, Thrive at Work, which accredits 'employers of choice' across the region, including Dudley. Employers that make a commitment to improve their employee health and wellbeing offer are supported through our Thrive at Work (best practice) framework, with our toolkit and continuous guidance, evidencing how they meet the framework's criteria on their journey to accreditation. Current programme funding (£1.5m across July 2022 – March 2024) comes from our role as delivery partner of the Mental Health and Productivity Pilot (MHPP) via Midlands Engine.
- The WMCA also offers Thrive into Work, an intensive employment support programme for residents with health barriers to work, based on an Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. This is currently funded (£7.9m across financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25) by DWP's IPS in Primary Care initiative (IPSPC), and acts as a trailblazer for the forthcoming Universal Support. Across Dudley, this is delivered by our partner Black Country Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. We also have a specialist neurodiversity pathway available to residents across the region, also delivered by BCHFT.
- Following the Autumn Statement announcement of a suite of measures to address health and employment, we worked with Black Country Integrated Care Board colleagues to support their bid to become a 'vanguard' site for the forthcoming WorkWell Partnership

programme, a joint DWP / DHSC initiative intended to provide an early intervention / low intensity service for those with health barriers to work and a single 'front door' for further interventions.

- The WMCA, with its subsidiary body WM5G, has secured £10m DLUHC funding (for financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25) to pilot / scale up digital health-tech innovations with our three local Integrated Care Boards. Through this, our Smart City Region programme, we are working closely with Birmingham and Solihull Integrated Care Board and local authority colleagues on remote monitoring, home diagnostics, a digital preventative health and wellbeing tool for employees (including the health and social care workforce) and transferable 'smart hospital' initiatives.

4. Strategy, Economy and Net Zero

4.1. Trailblazer Deeper Devolution Deal

- 4.1.1. The deal contains over 190 different commitments. Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council will benefit from specific benefits to Dudley and from the benefits that will be felt by the region as a whole.
- 4.1.2. The deal gives Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council 10-year certainty over its ability to retain business rates growth. The current rolling 100% business rate retention pilot could cease at any point. The deal therefore increases Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council's financial certainty.
- 4.1.3. The deal gives the region £100 million for town centre and estate regeneration and to support the delivery of complex housing sites, which is accessible to Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council. This is additional to the commitment to give the region more control over the Affordable Housing Programme, working with Homes England.
- 4.1.4. The deal gives the region new partnerships with Government in policy areas that are a priority for Dudley – skills and employment support services, housing, culture, digital infrastructure and economic development. They will bring policymaking closer to Dudley and offer opportunities to tailor policy to its local circumstances.
- 4.1.5. The Single Settlement:
 - Will enable Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council to contribute to the development of place-based strategies across the region. The strategies will bring together transport, housing, skills, net zero and local growth funding, to increase inclusive economic growth in targeted places across the region.
 - Will give Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council more influence over funding decisions. Through their role on WMCA Board, the Leader of Dudley will gain significantly more power over how funding devolved into the single settlement is prioritised across the region.

- Will give the region significantly more flexibility over funding decisions. WMCA will be able to select and fund projects to address the challenges facing the region with respect to levelling up, working towards an outcomes framework that will be jointly agreed between WMCA and government.
- Will increase certainty over the funding we receive through the single settlement. The settlement will offer a multi-year block grant, lasting for each Spending Review period, as opposed to the patchwork of 1- and 2-year grants we currently receive – strengthening our ability to do long-term economic planning across the region.
- The deal gives the region more flexibility over Skills Bootcamps, Free Courses for Jobs and future adult skills funding than any other area of England. This skills funding, along with partnership agreements with DWP and DfE, will allow us to shape the adult skills and education offer to better serve the needs of Dudley residents and be more closely aligned with current and emerging needs within the local labour market.
- People in Dudley will face fewer barriers to using public transport as a result of the commitment from government to integrate different modes of transport. This will open up economic opportunities for people and businesses in Sandwell. The deal also provides the region with the opportunity to have greater oversight of funding support for bus operators with the devolution of the Bus Services Operators Grant (BSOG).

4.2. Investment Zone

- 4.2.1. Although Dudley is not one of the local authority areas containing an Investment Zone site, it can still benefit in the long-term through the reinvestment of retained business rates into the primary economic sector – advanced manufacturing, around electric vehicles and battery technology, and its intersection with green industries, digital and health-tech. As such, it is important to note that government have accepted the region's Investment Zone proposition and the detailed approval is currently passing through parliamentary processes.
- 4.2.2. Once passed, this will see tax incentives and business rate retention sites at Birmingham Knowledge Quarter and Coventry-Warwick Gigapark, and capital investment into those sites and the Wolverhampton Green Innovation Corridor.
- 4.2.3. Dudley, and its businesses and residents, should also benefit from the range of business and skills support programmes also funded through the IZ which are being applied across the region. The £19m for these programmes will support businesses in R&D and supply chain development, as well as underpinning 'Angel funding' for

growing innovators, as well as skills support for residents, particularly in Levels 4/5.

4.3. Energy

- 4.3.1. Energy Capital works with Dudley MBC on all of its primary work areas; energy infrastructure, energy policy and retrofit.
- 4.3.2. The region is currently gearing up to input to the new Regional Energy Strategic Planning (RESP) process which OfGEM announced on the 15 November 2023. Energy Capital has been shaping this work with OfGEM to enhance the voice of places in the energy planning process through a project funded by OfGEMs Strategic Innovation Fund, called Project PRIDE. Dudley is a member of the Local Area Energy Planning Co-ordination Group (LAEP-CG), which is a local authority group leading the delivery of local area energy planning across the West Midlands to inform RESP. Fiona Mahon as Head of Energy, Sustainability and Climate Change is Dudley's representative on this group and has commented that it is a useful forum to understand strategic implications of energy planning processes.
- 4.3.3. As part of Project PRIDE, Energy Capital is working with National Grid and Advanced Infrastructure, to develop a digital tool which will enhance West Midlands local authorities' ability to engage in the energy system planning process, by providing data, insights and a valuable engagement tool. Dudley in the process of onboarding onto this platform with Harj Rayet having attended a number of training sessions and fed back as to the usefulness of the tool. We are keen to continue to trial this approach and understand the wider benefits of the LAEP data foundations development work, particularly as we have an opportunity to apply for further funding to expand this platform in terms of data availability and further functionality. We would especially like to understand how to account for major developments such as Dudley bus station and what impact this has on the wider community.
- 4.3.4. The Energy Capital team has also been working with Dudley on their district heating plans, both the immediate opportunities afforded by waste heat sources in the borough but more strategically by convening the Local Area Energy Plan Sub-Group on Heat. The remit of this group is to discuss a regional approach to heat networks and are working up a collective response to the DESNZ consultation on Heat Network Zoning Coordinator Role. If the national policy develops as indicated, it will mean new and significant responsibilities for a "heat network zone coordinator" to identify heat network zones, enter into commercial arrangements with the private sector to develop the heat networks within the zones, and enforce connections to qualifying buildings that will be mandated to connect. Energy Capital is working closing with Fiona and her team to discover the implications of the

various responsibilities of the role and pro-actively plan how to deliver the benefits of the proposals whilst managing and mitigating the inherent risks.

- 4.3.5. Dudley MBC has also been working closely with the Energy Capital delivery team on retrofit and form part of the WMCA led consortium on SHDF Wave 2.1 with the purpose of delivering energy efficient measures to around 27 tenanted properties within the borough, by September 2025. In addition, Energy Capital is also managing the HUG 2 programme on behalf of Dudley MBC, with the purpose of installing upgraded energy measures to approximately 70 privately owned homes which are “off gas” , the programme is currently targeting homes within the Brockmoor area of the borough. Energy Capital are also providing full customer journey and delivery support in order to achieve the target number of properties and establish “sign up “ of those residents who qualify through the schemes criteria, namely privately owned, off gas, and a gross household income of £31k or less. (This is now being reviewed by DESNZ and will increase to £36k from 2nd April 2024), project completion is 31 March 2025.
- 4.3.6. Dudley MBC is also working in partnership with the Energy Capital team to deliver the regions first Net Zero Neighbourhood as part of a regional cohort, with the other constituent local authorities. The project team comprises of Energy Capital & Dudley MBC, their lead partner EQUANS and a multi-disciplinary consortium of partners who will deliver energy systems, mobility and built environment improvements to the residents of Brockmoor. Energy Capital has been working closely with Dudley MBC as the project has entered its first phase of delivery consisting of an initial wave of community engagement events, retrofit assessments and installation of temperature & air quality sensors (both indoor & outdoor). Dudley MBC, through their participation in the Net Zero Neighbourhoods working group, are providing significant amounts of learnings and insights from the Brockmoor project to the other members of the regional cohort.

5. Housing, Property and Regeneration

- 5.1. The Directorate has been holding six weekly Local Authority meetings with Helen Martin (Director of Regeneration and Enterprise, DMBC) and her team to discuss property and grant cases. More recently, since the WMCA has appointed a new Head of Development and Delivery, we have moved to a quarterly engagement meeting. We consider this revised arrangement will deliver several benefits, including:
- 5.2. Allowing greater project advancement – thereby facilitating a deeper, broader and more strategic discussion between stakeholders regarding key decisions that support and enable the progression of projects, programmes and associated initiatives.

- 5.3. Promoting active project level conversations – during the intervening period encouraging greater collaboration with lead HPR Development Managers and their counterpart Local Authority contacts.
- 5.4. Alongside this, we work closely with Mark Clarke (Head of Regeneration Projects) to understand the local regeneration priorities, the constraints, possible collaboration, and likely timelines to bring forwards these projects.
- 5.5. Work is ongoing in relation to projects at Daniels land, Portersfield and Brierley Hill Access Link. In addition to these projects where Dudley Council is/has been the applicant, the WMCA is also working with three private sector developers on grant applications at Stallings Lane, Blowers Green and Thorns Road.
- 5.6. Previous and ongoing schemes include Dudley College of Technology, Black Country Living Museum, Cookley Works, Cavendish House and Wallows Road.
- 5.7. Also worth highlighting, following engagement on the Social Housing Decency Fund, the WMCA is providing £2.1m grant towards ventilation, insulation and heating works to 192 properties.
- 5.8. More details of current projects can be found in the tracker circulated to Members outside of the agenda pack.