

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Collaboration and Transformation Committee

12 December 2022

1. West Midlands Combined Authority – Trailblazing Devolution Deal

Report of the Clerk to the Authority

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1. THAT members note the current progress of the West Midlands Trailblazing Devolution Deal and the potential implications or opportunities for West Midlands Fire Service (WMFS).
- 1.2. THAT members consider how the Collaboration and Transformation Committee membership could facilitate great WMFS involvement in relevant aspects of the Trailblazing Devolution Deal as it is developed and implemented.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1. To provide members with the background to detail of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Trailblazing Devolution Deal as it currently stands.
- 2.2. To encourage discussion between Collaboration and Transformation Committee members on the opportunities presented by the Devolution Deal to the Fire Service and our vision of making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. The Government's February 2022 Levelling Up White Paper promised as part of its commitment to "Deepening Devolution" that it would open negotiations with West Midlands and Greater Manchester Combined Authorities over "Trailblazer" devolution deals designed to provide a blueprint for other combined

authorities.

- 3.2. These deals were designed to cover almost any area, with the two authorities invited to make suggestions for areas where government powers or funding could be devolved to either the Combined Authority or its constituent local authorities. Government also wanted to explore options to streamline Combined Authority funding.
- 3.3. Although Fire and Rescue Services are not specifically included within the scope of the deals, the wide range of areas they cover (see below) offer opportunities for FRS involvement and are likely to have direct impact on our work, including existing collaborations with local authorities.
- 3.4. West Midlands Combined Authority has been developing its devolution “asks” since early Spring 2022 in collaboration with a range of regional partners. In October 2022, the Combined Authority published a Levelling Up Growth Prospectus that outlined the overarching ambition of the Devolution Deal to “Level Up” the region through three broad workstreams:
 - Going Further and Faster – on drivers of growth that are already devolved to the Combined Authority in areas such as transport, housing and skills.
 - Rebooting the Economy – gaining new economic powers to help the region recover from the pandemic and unlock the region’s potential as “the engine room of the UK’s green industrial revolution”.
 - Public Services and Price in Place – help residents feel happy, healthy, well connected and safe while also feeling proud of where they live.
- 3.5. In total there are 16 devolution proposals, although there is no specific priority given to any particular proposal. Unlike previous devolution deals or situations where there are single pots of money from which to bid, the TDD proposals are being negotiated separately with relevant Government departments.
- 3.6. The devolution proposals have been developed according to a set of principles established by the WMCA Board in March 2022. This

includes clarity about the ‘local benefit’ of the proposals and that power should be drawn down from government and not ‘sucked up’ from the local level.

4. TRAILBLAZING DEVOLUTION DEAL WORKSTREAMS MOST RELEVANT TO WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

- 4.1. In reality, every one of the 16 devolution proposals would have relevance to West Midlands Fire Service, but there are some which are either most relevant or present the greatest opportunities for influence. **It should be noted that none of these proposals are yet accepted and are still to be agreed by both the WMCA and Government departments.**

4.2. Transport

This is a significant part of the deal and one where the CA already had significant devolved powers. The UK Government is committed to delivering “London-style” public transport across the UK. Amongst a wide range of proposals are numerous elements relevant to WMFS either in terms of our road and community safety role, or new and emerging risks that we may need to respond to:

- Creating a “Transport Regulatory Sandbox” to introduce greater innovation and flexibility in transport solutions, including experimental new vehicle types including automated vehicles, increased use of drones, more digital dynamic traffic management and greater data sharing on public transport and traffic.
- Decarbonising transport by electrifying transport infrastructure including freight.
- Changing transport behaviours including making use of speeding enforcement fines with local authorities to provide road safety infrastructure and introduce greater pavement parking enforcement powers.

4.3 Housing, Property and Regeneration

Again, building on existing powers, the proposals would see the region gain new powers and funding to deliver additional affordable housing, land reform and regenerating town centres and neighbourhoods. New housing will bring changing risks and

challenges around fire service provision, but there will also be opportunities for to be involved in improving poor quality housing and buildings which are higher risk for fire and ensure new buildings are resilient and safe.

4.4 Crime, community safety and resilience

[This proposal](#) focuses mostly on crime and criminal justice, despite the broader subject heading around community safety and resilience. It has been developed in partnership with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. It plans for a greater role for the PCC in criminal justice, including involvement in senior level appointments, powers to “call in” decisions and retention of various fines and profits from crime to spend on local priorities.

Powers and funding to intervene with young people to prevent violence and break the cycle of criminality will include diversionary interventions – this could extend to WMFS programmes such as cadets.

It may be that this area will develop further and could include areas such as the Local Resilience Forum – including potentially a greater role for the Mayor in its functioning.

4.5 Climate Adaptation and the Natural Environment

WMCA are already committed to making the West Midlands the first “Net Zero Region” with an ambitious 2041 Net Zero target. WMFS will clearly have a role to play in delivering this. Proposals under this stream include:

- 4.5.1 Working with the LRF to reduce community vulnerability to extreme weather events – which can both improve community safety and support our response to these events.
- 4.5.2 Securing funding to retrofit homes to improve energy efficiency
- 4.5.3 Establish the West Midlands as a ‘Pathfinder’ for Regional Adaptation Plans, bringing together government departments, local authorities, resilience forums, universities, and communities.

4.6 Health Inequalities

The devolution proposals include specific [plans around health inequality](#), which links closely to WMFS's own work on Reducing Health Inequalities as part of our CRMP. The WMCS plans to deliver this both through health interventions and areas such as employment and housing quality. Specific proposals include the development of a "Radical Health Prevention Fund" to unlock innovative, digital approaches to health prevention – which may present opportunities for WMFS prevention work.

4.7 Homelessness

[The proposals around homelessness prevention](#) include proposals to address and improve exempt accommodation, which will give local authorities more powers in enforcement and licensing to tackle rogue landlords who are putting vulnerable people at risk, including from fire.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

No initial Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken as this paper does not relate to policy change. However, there may be a requirement to undertake EIAs in relation to specific workstreams within the TDD which WMFS becomes involved in.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no matters within this paper that need to be brought to the attention of the Monitoring Officer.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct financial implications at this point from either the Trailblazing Devolution Deal or West Midlands Fire Service's engagement with it. However, there may be funding opportunities as a result of individual TDD workstreams, which will need to be considered individually.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

The WMCA have a target of Net Zero for the West Midlands Region by 2041. The proposals under the "Climate Adaptation and

the Natural Environment” may have significant environmental implications.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- [Levelling Up the United Kingdom – Government White Paper](#)
- [WMCA Levelling Up Prospectus](#)

The contact for this report is Tom Embury, Deputy Clerk to the Authority

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