



Black Country
Chamber of
Commerce

LEVELLING-UP WHITE PAPER SUMMARY

2 February 2022

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Background

On 2nd February 2022, the Rt Hon. Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities unveiled the Levelling-Up White Paper to parliament.

As a new home to the Government department tasked with the development and delivery of policy, Wolverhampton had already been earmarked as a testbed for rollout of new policy ideas. This has led to many businesses in the Black Country seeking to better understand what this flagship agenda means for them.

Designed to spread opportunities and prosperity across the UK, the Whitepaper sets out an ambitious range of measures across 12 quantifiable missions, to be achieved by 2030 and greater powers being devolved to regional and local bodies.

As a result, it is intended that pay, employment and productivity will grow, everywhere, and the gap between top and worst performing areas will be narrowed and more powers will be devolved to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and Mayoral Combined Authorities across the UK.

Summary

- Twelve bold national levelling up missions, given status in law, will shift Government focus and resources to Britain's forgotten communities throughout 2020s.
- Heralded as the biggest devolution of power from Whitehall to local leaders in modern times – delivering increased powers for Metro Mayors and their Combined Authorities
- The beginning of decade long project to level up Britain, with radical new policies announced across the board
- Domestic public investment in R&D to increase by at least 40% across the North, Midlands, Southwest, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

Chamber Reaction

Responding to the details in the Whitepaper, Chamber CEO Corin Crane said:

“Since levelling up was first touted in 2019, our members have been patiently waiting for detail and clarity about what this means for them. Overall, we positively welcome the announcements which will address the longstanding inequalities experienced by Black Country businesses and our citizens. The focus on skills and innovation alongside a determination to regenerate and improve living standards is especially welcomed and an emphasis on infrastructure will hit the right notes for businesses as they strive to make Brexit work and live with COVID-19.

“This is neither a quick nor easy fix and it requires money delivered supported by local decision-making to sustain it throughout the 2020s and beyond - ensuing that these plans have any meaningful impact and local legacy. As more details emerge, we will continue to scrutinise and make sense of what they mean for Black Country businesses to ensure that local voices have a say in wealth generation which benefits our business community and wider communities.”

The 12 Missions

Central to the policy are 12, quantifiable missions to be achieved by 2030 and given status in law in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

These missions will be cross-government, cross-society efforts and aim to see pay, employment, and productivity growing everywhere and the disparities between the top and worst performing areas narrow.

It is hoped that considerable government focus will ensure that R&D investment outside of the South East region increases, areas are regenerated, with improvement of their public transport systems to match those of London, increased 5G connectivity, illiteracy and innumeracy eliminated, and priority skills responses based upon the needs of local skills gaps.

The missions, state that by 2030:

1. Pay, employment and productivity will have risen in every area as the economic gap closes.
2. Domestic public investment in R&D will increase by at least one third and by at least 40% as additional government funding and private sector investment stimulates innovation and productivity growth.
3. Local public transport connectivity across the country to be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fare systems and integrated ticketing.
4. The UK will have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband network, with an aspiration for 5G coverage for most of the population.
5. The number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths will have significantly increased.
6. The number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased.
7. The gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed.
8. Wellbeing will have improved in every area, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.
9. Pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen.
10. Renters to have a secure path to ownership and the number of first-time buyers increasing.
11. Homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime will have fallen.
12. Every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution alongside simplified, long-term funding settlements.

PARTICULAR HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE BLACK COUNTRY

More Decisions, Locally

The Government recognises the strong local leadership mayors, including the WMCA's Andy Street, play in making levelling up successful and will seek to both replicate this in other areas and increase powers of existing mayoralities. With the WMCA expected to be one of the regions benefiting from a 'trailblazing' devolution deal.

The £2.6bn Shared Prosperity Fund that seeks to replace previous rounds of European Structural Funds, is set to be decentralised as far as possible to regenerate communities, boost skills and support the local economy.

Innovation

The West Midlands is to become home to one of three new 'Innovation Accelerators', clusters of local businesses and researchers back by £100m of new funding in an attempt to replicate the MIT and Silicon Valley models.

Skills

Locations to be confirmed, across England, 55 Education Investment Areas (EIAs) will be created to ensure the worst-off schools receive the most support and new specialist 'Sixth Form Free Schools' to ensure students from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to high standards of education.

Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) will be rolled out with funding across England, giving local employer bodies and stakeholders a statutory role in planning skills training in their area, to better meet local labour market needs.

Place

Wolverhampton joins Sheffield to become the first of 20 Kings Cross-style regeneration projects which will transform derelict urban sites into vibrant, multipurpose communities with new homes and investment to help retail thrive and the Arts Council will be tasked with spearheading a commitment to increase cultural spending outside of London.

Get In touch:

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