**Statement of Intent from West Midlands council leaders**

Following constructive and positive discussions, the leaders of the local authorities listed below have today issued the following statement:

1. In the light of developments in policy from both the Government and Opposition, we believe that there is now an unprecedented window of opportunity for the West Midlands, along with the other cities and city regions of England, to claim significant new powers and devolved resources from central government.  We recognise that this will require us to collaborate more effectively, not least by establishing stronger accountability arrangements for city region governance.
2. We have, therefore, agreed to commence the first stage in the creation of a Combined Authority, with the intention that the detailed Scheme for the Authority will be produced by April 2015 and approval gained by the end of next year.
3. The details of the functions and governance will be the subject of these talks.  But we have already agreed that at its inception, the Combined Authority will focus on strategic planning and delivery for economic development and transport. It will be for the members of the Combined Authority to decide at a later date whether or not to include further functions.
4. We have also agreed that whilst a Combined Authority is a way of strengthening our collaboration on specific policy areas for the good of the West Midlands as a whole, it formation will not alter the autonomy or sovereignty of each local authority.  We will celebrate, and not seek to dilute, the separate identities of each local area and the diversity within the city region.
5. Birmingham and the Black Country leaders are fully committed to forming a Combined Authority and we have invited other districts to join us in the creation of an Authority that also includes Solihull, the other districts within the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership area, Coventry and the districts surrounding Coventry.
6. Both Solihull and Coventry are in the process of making their own local decisions about future collaboration and therefore at this stage, whilst they will be fully engaged in ongoing discussions and are supporting this statement, they are not yet able to give a firm commitment as to their intentions.  However they expect to be able to confirm their position in the near future.
7. For Birmingham and the Black Country district this statement represents a clear and firm commitment today to participate in the proposed Combined Authority.
8. This means that, whilst authorities may move at different speeds and be engaged in the Combined Authority in different ways, they will all be engaged in the process from the beginning.
9. The future boundaries of the three Local Enterprise Partnerships included in this area, and their relationship to the Combined Authority will also be a matter for further talks.
10. We believe that a Combined Authority on this geography brings together the core elements of a West Midlands economic powerhouse. It would have a potential population of 3.4 million and the economic and political weight to drive local growth and place the West Midlands at the forefront of the nation’s economic recovery.
11. In addition, we will continue to collaborate with the East Midlands and the wider West Midlands to support the Midlands’ role as a national manufacturing hub and invest in vital east-west infrastructure improvements through Midlands Connect.

Signed by the leaders of:

Dudley Borough Council

Sandwell Borough Council

Wolverhampton City Council

Walsall Borough Council

Birmingham City Council