

3.0 WISE Annex March 2026

3.1 WMCA Economic Dashboard (Prepared by the EIU)

National

Six Weekly Business Dashboard

Theme	Indicator	December 2024	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025	July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025	Trend	Relative to Peer Group ¹	Commentary																									
Business	National Business Investment ² (update due Mar 2026)	£74.4bn (Q4)			£78.1bn (Q1)			£76.6bn (Q2)			£77.9bn (Q3)			£75.8bn (Q4)	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>2021</th> <th>2022</th> <th>2023</th> <th>2024</th> <th>2025</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>£65.1bn Q1</td> <td>£71.2bn Q1</td> <td>£73.0bn Q1</td> <td>£73.0bn Q1</td> <td>£78.1bn Q1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£67.6bn Q2</td> <td>£72.1bn Q2</td> <td>£73.2bn Q2</td> <td>£74.5bn Q2</td> <td>£76.6bn Q2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£67.2bn Q3</td> <td>£70.9bn Q3</td> <td>£71.4bn Q3</td> <td>£76.0bn Q3</td> <td>£77.9bn Q3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>£69.7bn Q4</td> <td>£70.1bn Q4</td> <td>£73.0bn Q4</td> <td>£74.4bn Q4</td> <td>£75.8bn Q4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	£65.1bn Q1	£71.2bn Q1	£73.0bn Q1	£73.0bn Q1	£78.1bn Q1	£67.6bn Q2	£72.1bn Q2	£73.2bn Q2	£74.5bn Q2	£76.6bn Q2	£67.2bn Q3	£70.9bn Q3	£71.4bn Q3	£76.0bn Q3	£77.9bn Q3	£69.7bn Q4	£70.1bn Q4	£73.0bn Q4	£74.4bn Q4	£75.8bn Q4		<p>Provisional estimates show that UK business investment was at £75.8bn in Q4 2025. It has decreased by 2.7% since Q3 2025.</p> <p>UK business investment is 2.0% above the level seen in Q4 2024.</p>
2021	2022	2023	2024	2025																																						
£65.1bn Q1	£71.2bn Q1	£73.0bn Q1	£73.0bn Q1	£78.1bn Q1																																						
£67.6bn Q2	£72.1bn Q2	£73.2bn Q2	£74.5bn Q2	£76.6bn Q2																																						
£67.2bn Q3	£70.9bn Q3	£71.4bn Q3	£76.0bn Q3	£77.9bn Q3																																						
£69.7bn Q4	£70.1bn Q4	£73.0bn Q4	£74.4bn Q4	£75.8bn Q4																																						

Regional

Monthly / Quarterly Business Dashboard

Theme	Indicator	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025	July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025	January 2026	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary										
Business	Regional Business Activity Index ³ (monthly update)	47.2	48.7	49.6	47.5	50.4	50.9	50.6	51.1	48.1	50.5	51.4	52.9	54.4	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Jan 2022</th> <th>Jan 2023</th> <th>Jan 2024</th> <th>Jan 2025</th> <th>Jan 2026</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>51.9</td> <td>49.0</td> <td>53.1</td> <td>47.2</td> <td>54.4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	51.9	49.0	53.1	47.2	54.4	<p>WM: 2nd Highest Region UK: 53.7 London: 57.7 (1st) Yorkshire & The Humber: 49.3 (12th)</p>	<p>The West Midlands Business Activity Index increased from 52.9 in December 2025 to 54.4 in January 2026, the fastest rise in output in the region for 21 months. Firms attributed the rise in activity to ongoing improvements in demand conditions and new order volumes.</p> <p>The UK Business Activity Index increased from 51.4 in December 2025 to 53.7 in January 2026.</p>
Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026																							
51.9	49.0	53.1	47.2	54.4																							

The Dashboard has been updated to reflect the WMCA 7 Met. geography where available.

¹ Comparisons vary depending on geography; Birmingham has been compared to Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle. Due to data availability, the WM 7 Met. has been either compared to other combined authorities (following what is available Greater London Authority is not always included), (traditional combined authorities are Greater Manchester CA (GMCA), Sheffield City Region, West Yorkshire CA, Liverpool City Region CA, Tees Valley CA, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CA, West of England CA, North East CA and North of Tyne CA, however for claimants/ ONS labour market activity new CAs are now available meaning the 15 will be - GMCA, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Devon & Torbay, Lancaster, Greater Lincolnshire, Hull & East Yorkshire, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, WMCA, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, West of England, York & North Yorkshire, East Midlands and the North East or NUTS 2 / ITL 2 geography. The West Midlands region has been compared to other regions in the UK. No comparators have been included for UK-wide. The GVA indicator now includes 15 agreed Combined Authorities.

² Office for National Statistics (ONS), Business investment in the UK: October to December 2025 provisional results – released February 2026.

³ NatWest, UK regional growth tracker report– released February 2026

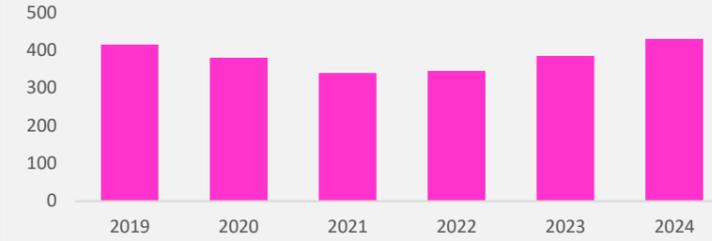
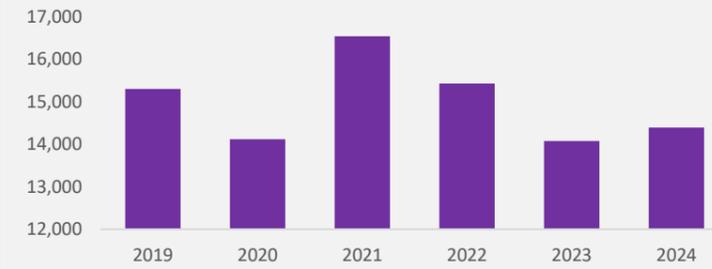
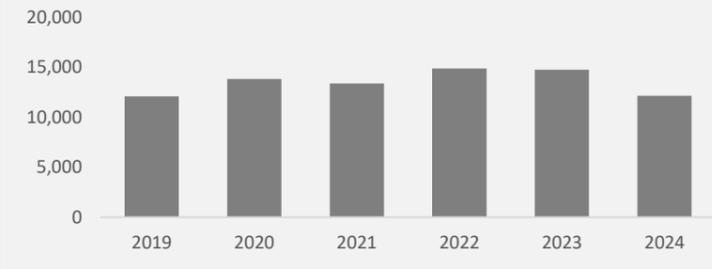
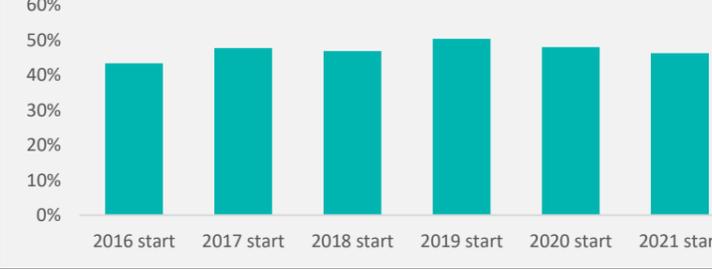
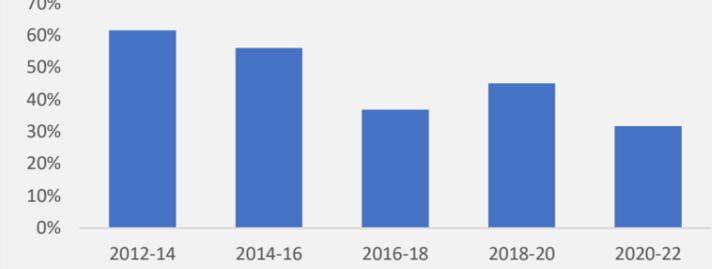
Theme	Indicator	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025	July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025	January 2026	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary										
Business	Regional Future Business Activity Index ⁴ (monthly update)	69.8	74.3	68.5	67.3	75.2	70.7	69.6	74.2	71.4	72.1	69.5	74.9	72.2	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Jan 2022</th> <th>Jan 2023</th> <th>Jan 2024</th> <th>Jan 2025</th> <th>Jan 2026</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>80.3</td> <td>76.5</td> <td>78.1</td> <td>69.8</td> <td>72.2</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	80.3	76.5	78.1	69.8	72.2	WM: 5 th Highest Region London: 76.6 (1 st) Northern Ireland: 59.2 (12 th)	The West Midlands Future Business Activity Index decreased from 74.9 in December 2025 to 72.2 in January 2026, with sentiment among West Midlands firms higher than across the UK as a whole. Expectations of new client wins and improving customer confidence, alongside investment and new product releases, underpinned optimistic forecasts.
	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026																						
	80.3	76.5	78.1	69.8	72.2																						
WMCA (7 Met.) Enterprise Deaths ⁵ (quarterly – update due Apr 2026)			3,840 (Q1)			2,880 (Q2)							2,875 (Q4)		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Q4 2021</th> <th>Q4 2022</th> <th>Q4 2023</th> <th>Q4 2024</th> <th>Q4 2025</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>3,420</td> <td>3,625</td> <td>3,700</td> <td>3,095</td> <td>2,875</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Q4 2021	Q4 2022	Q4 2023	Q4 2024	Q4 2025	3,420	3,625	3,700	3,095	2,875	WMCA: 2 nd Highest CA GMCA: 2,935 (1 st) Hull & East Yorkshire: 495 (15 th)	The number of business deaths in the WMCA area in Q4 2025 was 2,875. This figure was 7.1% (-220) lower than the number of business deaths in Q4 2024, while the UK fell by 3.6%. Quarter on quarter analysis (between Q3 2025 and Q4 2025) shows an increase in business deaths of 2.7% (+75) for the WMCA area, the UK increased by 4.5%.
Q4 2021	Q4 2022	Q4 2023	Q4 2024	Q4 2025																							
3,420	3,625	3,700	3,095	2,875																							
WMCA (7 Met.) Enterprise Births ⁶ (quarterly – update due Apr 2026)			3,845 (Q1)			3,210 (Q2)							3,025 (Q4)		<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Q4 2021</th> <th>Q4 2022</th> <th>Q4 2023</th> <th>Q4 2024</th> <th>Q4 2025</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>3,655</td> <td>3,380</td> <td>3,375</td> <td>2,960</td> <td>3,025</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Q4 2021	Q4 2022	Q4 2023	Q4 2024	Q4 2025	3,655	3,380	3,375	2,960	3,025	WMCA: 2 nd Highest CA GMCA: 3,360 (1 st) Tees Valley 555 (15 th)	The number of business births in the WMCA area in Q4 2025 was 3,025. This figure was 2.2% (+65) higher than the number of business births in Q4 2024. The UK increased by 10.0% over this period. Quarter on quarter analysis (between Q3 2025 and Q4 2025) shows a decrease of 8.1% (-265) for the WMCA area, while the UK decreased by 1.9%.
Q4 2021	Q4 2022	Q4 2023	Q4 2024	Q4 2025																							
3,655	3,380	3,375	2,960	3,025																							

⁴ NatWest, UK regional growth tracker report– released February 2026

⁵ ONS, Business demography, quarterly experimental statistics, low-level geographic breakdown, UK – released January 2026.

⁶ ONS, Business demography, quarterly experimental statistics, low-level geographic breakdown, UK – released January 2026.

Annual Business Dashboard

Theme	Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary
Business	WMCA (7 Met.) High Growth Enterprises ⁷ (annual – update due Nov 2026)	415	380	340	345	385	430		WMCA: 3 rd Highest CA GMCA: 580 (1 st) Tees Valley: 90 (15 th)	The latest available data for the WMCA area shows that the number of high growth enterprises has increased for the third consecutive year. There was a total of 430 high growth enterprises in the WMCA area in 2024, an increase of 11.7% (+45) since 2023, the UK increased by 4.2%.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Enterprise Births ⁸ (annual – update due Nov 2026)	15,310	14,125	16,550	15,435	14,080	14,395		WMCA: 2 nd Highest CA GMCA: 15,150 (1 st) Hull & East Yorkshire: 2,475 (15 th)	Enterprise births in the WMCA area increased by 2.2% (+315) since 2023 to 14,395 in 2024. Over this period, the UK increased by 0.4%. In 2024, there were 2,255 more enterprise births than deaths.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Enterprise Deaths ⁹ (annual – update due Nov 2026)	12,080	13,830	13,375	14,865	14,760	12,140		WMCA: 2 nd Highest CA GMCA: 12,735 (1 st) Hull & East Yorkshire 2,035 (15 th)	Enterprise deaths in the WMCA area decreased by 17.8% (-2,620) since 2023 to 12,140 in 2024. Over this period, the UK decreased by 9.5%. In 2024, there were 2,255 more enterprise births than deaths.
	WMCA (7 Met.) 3 Year Enterprise Survival Rates ¹⁰ (annual – update due Nov 2026)	43.4% (2016 birth)	47.7% (2017 birth)	46.9% (2018 birth)	50.4% (2019 birth)	48.0% (2020 birth)	46.3% (2021 birth)		WMCA: Lowest CA UK: 53.5% York and North Yorkshire: 60.3% (1 st) Liverpool City Region: 47.6% (14 th)	Across 1-to-5-year enterprise survival rates, the WMCA performs worse than nationally. Of the 16,550 enterprise births in 2021 in the WMCA area, 46.3% (7,665) were still active after 3 years compared to 53.5% for the UK.
	WM 7 Met. Innovation Active Businesses ¹¹ (Biennial – update due May 2026)		45.0% (2018-20)		31.7% (2020-22)				WM 7 Met.: 8 th Lowest/ 40 UK: 36.3% Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, Wiltshire & Bath/Bristol area: 45.0% (Joint 1 st) Outer London – East & North East: 27.0% (40 th)	Trends in the proportion of businesses that are innovation active continues to fluctuate. Following the national trend (decreasing from 44.9% in 2018-2020 to 36.3% in 2020-22), the WM 7 Met. Area decreased from 45.0% in 2018-20 to 31.7% in 2020-22.

⁷ ONS, Business Demography (provisional for 2022), UK 2024 – released November 2025

⁸ ONS, Business Demography (provisional for 2022), UK 2024 – released November 2025

⁹ ONS, Business Demography (provisional for 2022), UK 2024 – released November 2025

¹⁰ ONS, Business Demography (provisional for 2022), UK 2024 – released November 2025

¹¹ Department for Business and Trade, UK Innovation Survey 2023 – released May 2024

Quarterly Place Dashboard

Theme	Indicator	December 2024	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025	July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary																														
Place	Birmingham City Centre Rent ¹² (Quarterly – update due May 2026)	£43.25 Per Sq ft (Q4)			£43.25 Per Sq ft (Q1)			£45.50 Per Sq ft (Q2)			£46.50 Per Sq ft (Q3)			£46.00 Per Sq ft (Q3)	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>2021</th> <th>2022</th> <th>2023</th> <th>2024</th> <th>2025</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Q1</td> <td>£37.00</td> <td>£39.00</td> <td>£40.00</td> <td>£42.50</td> <td>£43.25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q2</td> <td>£37.00</td> <td>£39.00</td> <td>£41.00</td> <td>£43.25</td> <td>£45.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q3</td> <td>£37.50</td> <td>£40.00</td> <td>£41.00</td> <td>£43.25</td> <td>£46.50</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q4</td> <td>£37.50</td> <td>£40.00</td> <td>£41.00</td> <td>£43.25</td> <td>£46.00</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Q1	£37.00	£39.00	£40.00	£42.50	£43.25	Q2	£37.00	£39.00	£41.00	£43.25	£45.50	Q3	£37.50	£40.00	£41.00	£43.25	£46.50	Q4	£37.50	£40.00	£41.00	£43.25	£46.00	<p>Birmingham: Joint 2nd Highest (with Edinburgh and Leeds) / 9</p> <p>Bristol: £50.00 (1st)</p> <p>Liverpool: £29.50 (9th)</p>	<p>Following a period of increases, vacancy fell 160 basis points to 11.3%, reflecting strong occupier sentiment as take-up outweighed the release of space. On an annual basis, office prime rents increased in 2025 to £46.00 per sq. ft, remaining one of the highest-rented markets in the Big Nine. Rent-free periods remain at 18 months for a 10-year period.</p>
	Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025																																									
Q1	£37.00	£39.00	£40.00	£42.50	£43.25																																										
Q2	£37.00	£39.00	£41.00	£43.25	£45.50																																										
Q3	£37.50	£40.00	£41.00	£43.25	£46.50																																										
Q4	£37.50	£40.00	£41.00	£43.25	£46.00																																										
	WMCA (7 Met.) Gigabit broadband Connectivity ¹³ (bi-annual – update due spring 2026)		94.9% premises (As of Jan 2025)						96.2% premises (As of Jul 2025)							<p>WMCA: Highest CA</p> <p>UK: 87.1%</p> <p>Hull & East: 95.3% (2nd)</p> <p>Devon & Torbay: 71.3% (15th)</p>	<p>As of July 2025, 96.2% of premises in the WMCA area had gigabit broadband availability – remained significantly above the UK-wide figure of 87.1%.</p>																														

¹² Avison Young, The Big Nine – created January 2026.

¹³ Ofcom, connected nations – released November 2025. Please note, there was no Summer 2024 release.

Quarterly Economy Dashboard

Regional

Theme	Indicator	September 2024	October 2024	November 2024	December 2024	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025	July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary
Economy	Regional Exports in Goods ¹⁴ (quarterly – update due Mar 2026)	£35.4bn (Year to Q3 2024)			£35.3bn (Full Year 2024)			£34.9bn (Year to Q1 2025)			£34.2bn (Year to Q2 2025)			£33.2bn (Year to Q3 2025)	<p>Year to Q3 2021: £26.5bn Year to Q3 2022: £28.0bn Year to Q3 2023: £34.0bn Year to Q3 2024: £35.3bn Year to Q3 2025: £33.2bn</p>	WM – 4 th Highest Region South East: 11.3% (1 st) Northern Ireland: 3.1% (12 th)	<p>In the year ending Q3 2025, the West Midlands region exported £33.2bn worth of goods, a decrease of £2.2bn (-6.3%, UK: -1.0%) compared to the previous annual period.</p> <p>The West Midlands accounted for 9.4% of UK exports.</p> <p>The West Midlands had a trade deficit of £9.4bn.</p>
	Regional Imports in Goods ¹⁵ (quarterly – update due Mar 2026)	£42.5bn (Year to Q3 2024)			£42.7bn (Full Year 2024)			£42.8bn (Year to Q1 2025)			£42.4bn (Year to Q2 2025)			£42.6bn (Year to Q3 2025)	<p>Year to Q3 2021: £34.0bn Year to Q3 2022: £40.5bn Year to Q3 2023: £42.5bn Year to Q3 2024: £42.7bn Year to Q3 2025: £42.6bn</p>	WM – 5 th Highest Region South East: 18.3% (1 st) Northern Ireland: 1.7% (12 th)	<p>Goods imports to the West Midlands region were worth £42.6bn in the year ending Q3 2025, an annual increase of £74m (+0.2%, UK: +3.2%).</p> <p>The West Midlands accounted for 7.1% of UK's goods imports.</p>

¹⁴ HMRC, UK regional trade in goods statistics – released December 2025. Data is not comparable across the dashboard. Please note, annual change figures in the commentary section may not sum due to rounding.

¹⁵ HMRC, UK regional trade in goods statistics – released December 2025. Data is not comparable across the dashboard. Please note, annual change figures in the commentary section may not sum due to rounding.

Annual Economy Dashboard

Theme	Indicator	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary	
Economy	WMCA FDI Projects ¹⁶ (annual – update due Jun / Jul 2026)							70	58		WM 7 Met.: 4 th Highest ITL 2 / 31 Inner London - West: 264 (1 st) Lincolnshire and Outer London – South: 13 (Joint 31 st)	For the West Midlands 7 Met. Area, the number of single site FDI projects decreased from 70 in 2023/24 to 58 in 2024/25 (-17.1%). The UK had an overall decrease of 11.6% to 1,375.	
	WMCA FDI New Jobs ¹⁷ (annual – update due Jun / Jul 2026)							6,082	2,758		WM 7 Met.: 5 th Highest ITL 2 / 31 Inner London - West: 15,526 (1 st) North Yorkshire: 249 (31 st)	The number of new jobs created decreased from 6,082 in 2023/24 to 2,758 in 2024/25 (-54.7%) in the West Midlands 7 Met. Area. The UK experienced an annual decrease of 3.0% (from 71,478 in 2023/24 to 69,355 in 2024/25).	
	WMCA (7 Met.) Smoothed GVA per Hour ¹⁸ (Annual – update due June 2026)	£31.66	£32.36	£33.25	£34.27	£35.18	£35.72					WMCA: 4 th Lowest CA / 10 UK: £41.87 West of England: £42.01 (1 st) South Yorkshire: £33.77 (14 th)	In 2023, GVA per hour in the WMCA area was £35.72. Since 2022, the WMCA area increased by 1.5% (+£0.54) and the UK increased by 2.2%. When compared to 2018, GVA per hour in the WMCA area increased by 12.8% (+£4.06) while the UK increased by 18.3%. In 2023, UK GVA per hour was £41.87 meaning the WMCA area had a shortfall of £6.15.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Total GVA – Chained Volume Measures in	£77.9bn	£77.0bn	£67.2bn	£73.6bn	£76.1bn	£76.9bn					WMCA: 2 nd Highest CA / 15 GMCA: £92.2bn (1 st) Hull & East Yorkshire (CER): £15.5bn (15 th)	The WMCA area total GVA increased from £76.1bn in 2022 to £76.9bn in 2023. This equated to a 1.0% (+£774m) annual increase which was above the UK growth rate of 0.3%.

¹⁶ Department for Business and Trade (DBT), inward investment results – released June 2025.

¹⁷ DBT, inward investment results – released June 2025.

¹⁸ ONS, regional and subregional labour productivity – released June 2025. In this publication ONS covered fourteen Combined Authorities: Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Liverpool City Region, Tees Valley, West Midlands, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, West of England, York & North Yorkshire, East Midlands, North East, Hull & East Yorkshire, Greater Lincolnshire and Lancashire.

Theme	Indicator	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary												
	2022 Money Value ¹⁹ (Annual – update due TBC 2026)																							
Economy	WMCA (7 Met.) Exports in Services ²⁰ (Annual – update TBC 2026)	£8.3bn	£8.7bn	£7.8bn	£8.0bn	£9.2bn	£11.0bn			<table border="1"> <caption>WMCA Exports in Services (2019-2023)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Value (£bn)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>8.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>8.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>7.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022</td> <td>9.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023</td> <td>11.0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Value (£bn)	2019	8.3	2020	8.7	2021	7.8	2022	9.2	2023	11.0	<p>WMCA: 4th Highest / 8 Greater London Authority - Inner London: £184.8bn (1st) North of Tyne: £3.8bn (8th)</p>	<p>Since the year ending 2022, the WMCA's total value in service exports increased by £1.8bn (+19.3%) to £11.0bn in 2023. The overall value of UK trade in service exports increased, by 13.9% (to £417.6bn) in 2023.</p> <p>The WMCA had a trade surplus of £7.0bn in 2023.</p>
	Year	Value (£bn)																						
2019	8.3																							
2020	8.7																							
2021	7.8																							
2022	9.2																							
2023	11.0																							
	WMCA (7 Met.) Imports in Services ²¹ (Annual – update TBC 2026)	£3.6bn	£3.7bn	£3.9bn	£3.4bn	£3.6bn	£4.1bn			<table border="1"> <caption>WMCA Imports in Services (2019-2023)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Value (£bn)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>3.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>3.7</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>3.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022</td> <td>3.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023</td> <td>4.1</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Value (£bn)	2019	3.6	2020	3.7	2021	3.9	2022	3.6	2023	4.1	<p>WMCA: 5th Lowest / 10 Greater London Authority - Inner London: £71.2bn (1st) Tees Valley: £570m (10th)</p>	<p>Since 2022, the value of WMCA imports increased by £494m (+13.6%) to £4.1bn in 2023. UK-wide total imports increased by 16.2% to £292.1bn.</p>
Year	Value (£bn)																							
2019	3.6																							
2020	3.7																							
2021	3.9																							
2022	3.6																							
2023	4.1																							

¹⁹ ONS, Regional economic activity by gross domestic product, UK: 1998 to 2023 – released April 2025. This recently updated indicator now has a peer group which covers fifteen currently agreed combined authorities, twelve of which match ITL2 subregions, and the other three are included as city and enterprise regions (CER). The peer group includes Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Devon & Torbay (CER), East Midlands, Greater Lincolnshire (CER), Greater Manchester, Hull & East Yorkshire (CER), Lancashire, Liverpool City Region, North East, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, West Midlands, West of England, West Yorkshire and York & North Yorkshire.

²⁰ ONS, International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2023 – released August 2025. Peer Group Combined Authorities are – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Greater London Authority – Inner and Outer, Liverpool City Region, North of Tyne, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, West Midlands, West Yorkshire and West of England. However, no data is available for Tees Valley, South Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough CA

²¹ ONS, International trade in UK nations, regions and cities: 2023 – released August 2025. Combined Authorities are – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Greater Manchester, Greater London Authority – Inner and Outer, Liverpool City Region, North of Tyne, South Yorkshire, Tees Valley, West Midlands, West Yorkshire and West of England. However, no data is available for Liverpool City Region.

Monthly People Dashboard

Theme	Indicator	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025	July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025	January 2026	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary
People	WMCA (7 Met.) Claimants (16+) ²² (monthly update)	143,575 (7.5% of Pop. aged 16-64)	147,400 (7.7% of Pop. aged 16-64)	147,835 (7.7% of Pop. aged 16-64)	146,120 (7.6% of Pop. aged 16-64)	144,750 (7.5% of Pop. aged 16-64)	145,170 (7.5% of Pop. aged 16-64)	142,280 (7.4% of Pop. aged 16-64)	141,890 (7.4% of Pop. aged 16-64)	141,350 (7.3% of Pop. aged 16-64)	140,760 (7.3% of Pop. aged 16-64)	139,605 (7.2% of Pop. aged 16-64)	138,270 (7.2% of Pop. aged 16-64) Revised	139,840 (7.3% of Pop. aged 16-64) Provisional		<p>WMCA: Highest CA Eng.: 4.0% West Yorkshire: 4.9% (2nd) York & North Yorkshire: 1.9% (15th)</p>	<p>Provisional estimates show there were 139,840 claimants in the WMCA area in January 2026. Since December 2025, there has been an increase of 1.1% (+1,570) claimants in the WMCA area, while England increased by 2.4%. When compared to January 2025 claimants have decreased by 2.6% (-3,735) in the WMCA area, with England decreasing by 1.6%.</p>
	WMCA (7 Met.) Youth Claimants (18-24) ²³ (monthly update)	26,325 (8.6% of Pop. aged 18-24)	26,960 (8.8% of Pop. aged 18-24)	27,360 (8.9% of Pop. aged 18-24)	27,340 (8.9% of Pop. aged 18-24)	27,045 (8.8% of Pop. aged 18-24)	27,265 (8.9% of Pop. aged 18-24)	27,540 (8.9% of Pop. aged 18-24)	28,425 (9.2% of Pop. aged 18-24)	28,425 (9.2% of Pop. aged 18-24)	28,835 (9.4% of Pop. aged 18-24)	29,245 (9.5% of Pop. aged 18-24)	29,080 (9.4% of Pop. aged 18-24) Revised	29,070 (9.4% of Pop. aged 18-24) Provisional		<p>WMCA: Highest CA Eng.: 5.7% Tees Valley: 7.7% (2nd) York & North Yorkshire: 2.7% (15th)</p>	<p>Provisional estimates show there were 29,070 youth claimants in the WMCA area in January 2026. Since December 2025, there has been a decrease of 0.03% (+10) youth claimants in the WMCA area, England-wide youth claimants increased by 1.0%. When compared to January 2025, youth claimants have increased by 10.4% (+2,745) in the WMCA area, with England increasing by 9.9%.</p>
	WM 7 Met. Seasonally Adjusted Payrolled Employees ²⁴ (monthly update)	1,259,412	1,258,873	1,258,046	1,259,853	1,258,279	1,257,064	1,256,627	1,257,421	1,255,002	1,253,823	1,253,777	1,251,896	1,251,306		<p>WM 7 Met.: 3rd Highest NUTS 2 / 41 Surrey, East & West Sussex: 1,308,326 (1st) Highlands & Islands: 208,364 (41st)</p>	<p>The latest (provisional) figures show there has been recent decreases in payrolled employees for the WM 7 Met. area. The latest monthly decrease was 0.05% compared to 0.03% for the UK. There were over 1.25m payrolled employees in the WM 7 Met. area in January 2026. When compared to January 2025 there were 8,106 fewer payrolled employees (-0.6%) for the WM 7 Met. Area while the UK decreased by 0.4%.</p>
	WMCA (7 Met.) Employment Rate ²⁵ (quarterly – update due Apr 2026)			70.0% (Year Ending Mar 2025)			70.1% (Year Ending Jun 2025)			70.6% (Year Ending Sep 2025)						<p>WMCA: 3rd Lowest CA UK: 75.5% West of England: 79.7% (1st) North East: 70.3% (15th)</p>	<p>The WMCA area employment rate was 70.6% in the year ending September 2025, this was an increase of 0.9pp since the year ending September 2024. While the UK employment rate increased by 0.2pp.</p>

²² ONS/DWP, claimant count – released February 2026.

²³ ONS/DWP, claimant count – released February 2026.

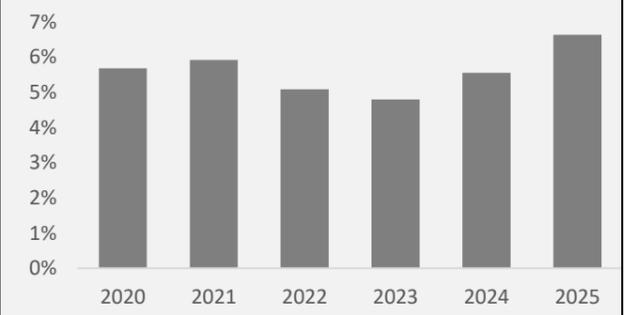
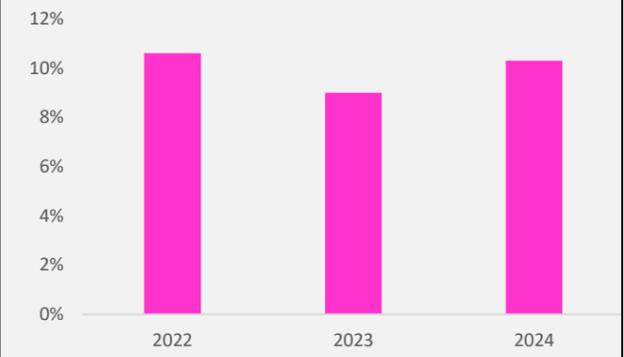
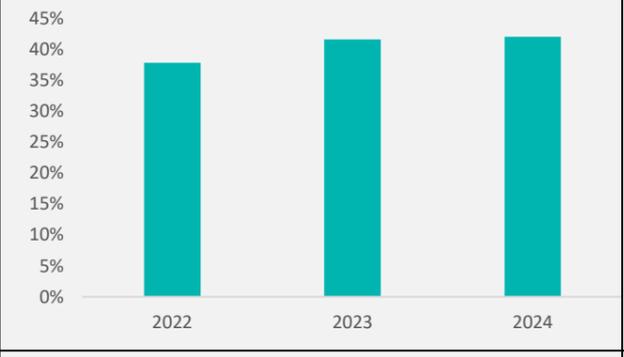
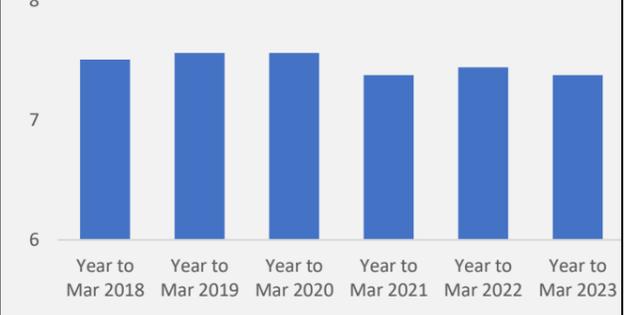
²⁴ ONS, Earnings and employment from Pay As You Earn Real Time Information – released February 2026.

²⁵ ONS, Annual Population Survey – released January 2026. Please note, figures are not comparable across the dashboard.

Theme	Indicator	January 2025	February 2025	March 2025	April 2025	May 2025	June 2025	July 2025	August 2025	September 2025	October 2025	November 2025	December 2025	January 2026	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary	
People	WMCA (7 Met.) Economic Inactivity Rate ²⁶ (quarterly – update due Apr 2026)			25.3% (Year Ending Mar 2025)			24.9% (Year Ending Jun 2025)			23.8% (Year Ending Sep 2025)					<p>Year to Sep-20: 25.3% Year to Sep-21: 24.9% Year to Sep-22: 26.3% Year to Sep-23: 24.9% Year to Sep-24: 25.8% Year to Sep-25: 23.8%</p>	WMCA: 7 th Highest CA UK: 21.1% North East: 26.3% (1 st) West of England: 17.3% (15 th)	The WMCA area economic inactivity rate was 23.8% in the year ending September 2025, a decrease of 2.0pp since the year ending September 2024. The UK economic inactivity rate decreased by 0.6pp to 21.1%.	
	WMCA (7 Met.) Modelled Unemployment ²⁷ (quarterly – update due Apr 2026)			6.3% (Year Ending Mar 2025)			6.7% (Year Ending Jun 2025)			7.2% (Year Ending Sep 2025)					<p>Year to Sep-20: 6.3% Year to Sep-21: 7.2% Year to Sep-22: 6.7% Year to Sep-23: 6.5% Year to Sep-24: 5.9% Year to Sep-25: 7.2%</p>	WMCA: Highest CA England: 4.3% Tees Valley and Hull & East Yorkshire: 5.5% (Joint 2 nd) York & North Yorkshire: 1.5% (15 th)	Since the year ending September 2024, the WMCA area modelled unemployment rate has increased by 1.3pp to 7.2% in the year ending September 2025. England's modelled unemployment rate increased by 0.4pp to 4.3% in the year ending September 2025.	
	WMCA (7 Met.) Economic Activity Rate ²⁸ (quarterly – update due Apr 2026)			74.7% (Year Ending Mar 2025)			75.1% (Year Ending Jun 2025)			76.2% (Year Ending Sep 2025)						<p>Year to Sep-20: 74.7% Year to Sep-21: 75.5% Year to Sep-22: 73.9% Year to Sep-23: 75.5% Year to Sep-24: 74.4% Year to Sep-25: 76.2%</p>	WMCA: 7 th Lowest CA UK: 78.9% West of England: 82.7% (1 st) North East: 73.7% (15 th)	Overall, for the WMCA area, the economic activity rate was 76.2% in the year ending September 2025, an increase of 2.0pp since the year ending September 2024. The UK economic activity rate was 78.9% and increased by 0.6pp.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Adzuna Job Postings ²⁹ (monthly update)	51,037	51,023	49,572	47,268	45,715	48,285	55,783	44,290	44,196	58,427	45,055	37,090	39,207	<p>Jan 2022: 95,834 Jan 2023: 68,349 Jan 2024: 53,337 Jan 2025: 51,037 Jan 2026: 39,207</p>	-	In January 2026, there were 39,207 unique job postings on Adzuna, an increase of 2,117 from the previous month. When compared to January 2025, postings were 11,830 lower. The latest number of postings is high compared to the average for all combined authorities. The Interest Quotient was high at 2.3.	

²⁶ ONS, Annual Population Survey – released January 2026. Please note, figures are not comparable across the dashboard.
²⁷ ONS, modelled based estimates of unemployment – released January 2026. Please note, figures are not comparable across the dashboard.
²⁸ ONS, Annual Population Survey – released January 2026. Please note, figures are not comparable across the dashboard.
²⁹ Adzuna Intelligence – accessed February 2026.

Annual People Dashboard

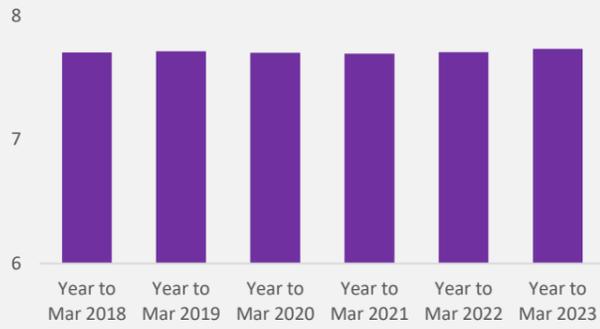
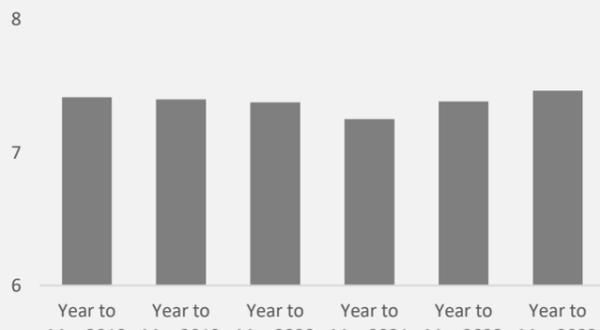
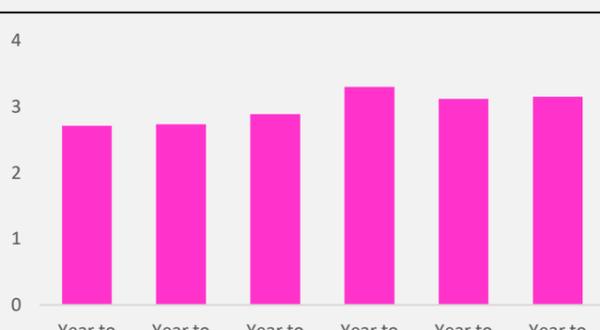
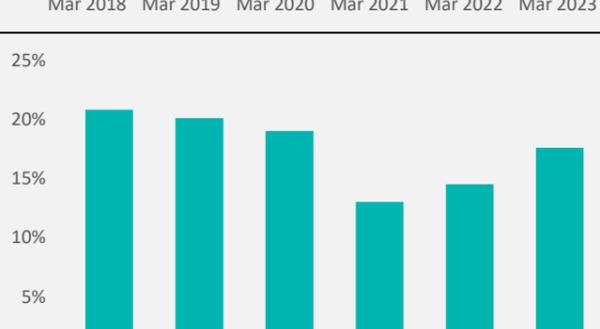
Theme	Indicator	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary
People	WMCA (7 Met.) Not In Education, Employment or Training (NEET) ³⁰ (annual – update July 2026)	7.1%	6.7%	5.8%	6.0%	5.2%	4.8%	5.6%	6.6%		England: 5.6%	In 2025, in the WMCA area, 6.6% of residents aged 16-17 years old were NEET (including not known). This has increased by 1.0pp in the WMCA area, while for the UK there was an increase of 0.2pp since 2024.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Working Age Population with No Qualifications ³¹ (annual – update due April 2026)					10.6%	9.0%	10.3%			WMCA: 2 nd Highest CA / 11 UK: 6.8% North East: 10.4% (1 st) West of England: 3.8% (11 th)	For the WMCA area, 10.3% (187,700) of the working age population had no qualifications in 2024, an increase of 14.5% (+23,700) since 2023. While for the UK, 6.8% had no qualifications, an annual increase of 2.7%. To match the UK proportion, 64,687 residents in the WMCA area would need to gain a qualification.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Working Age Population with RQF4+ Qualifications ³² (annual – update due April 2026)					37.8%	41.6%	42.0%			WMCA: 6 th CA / 11 UK: 47.4% West of England: 58.4% (1 st) South Yorkshire: 37.4% (11 th)	For the WMCA area, 42.0% (763,100) of the working age population had RQF4+ qualifications in 2024, an increase of 0.6% (+4,600) since 2023. While for the UK, 47.4% were qualified to RQF4+ levels, an annual increase of 1.3%. There was a shortfall in the WMCA area (to reach to the national average) of 97,576 people.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Average Life Satisfaction Score ³³ (annual – update TBC)	7.51 (Year Ending Mar 2018)	7.56 (Year Ending Mar 2019)	7.56 (Year Ending Mar 2020)	7.38 (Year Ending Mar 2021)	7.44 (Year Ending Mar 2022)	7.38 (Year Ending Mar 2023)					WMCA: Joint 4 th Highest CA (with Sheffield City Region) UK: 7.45 North of Tyne: 7.56 (1 st) Liverpool City Region: 7.30 (10 th)

³⁰ Department for Education, Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority – released July 2025. Participation estimates are based on data collected in March each year. In order to ensure the most robust estimates of NEET and not known rates an average of December/January/February data is used for an estimate around the end of the calendar year.

³¹ ONS, Annual Population Survey – released April 2025. Please note, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) estimates have been replaced with estimates on a Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) basis. RQF based estimates are available from the Jan – Dec 2022 survey period, while estimates prior to Jan – Dec 2022 remain on an NVQ basis.

³² ONS, Annual Population Survey – released April 2025. Please note, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) estimates have been replaced with estimates on a Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) basis. RQF based estimates are available from the Jan – Dec 2022 survey period, while estimates prior to Jan – Dec 2022 remain on an NVQ basis.

³³ ONS, Annual personal well-being estimates – released November 2023. Respondents were asked "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? Where 0 is 'not at all satisfied' and 10 is 'completely satisfied'"

Theme	Indicator	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Trend	Relative to Peer Group	Commentary
People	WMCA (7 Met.) Average Worthwhile Score ³⁴ (annual – update TBC)	7.71 (Year Ending Mar 2018)	7.71 (Year Ending Mar 2019)	7.70 (Year Ending Mar 2020)	7.70 (Year Ending Mar 2021)	7.71 (Year Ending Mar 2022)	7.73 (Year Ending Mar 2023)				WMCA: 3 rd Highest CA UK: 7.73 North of Tyne: 7.75 (1 st) West of England: 7.61 (10 th)	For the year ending March 2023, the average worthwhile score for the WMCA area was 7.73 (out of 10), now matching the UK-wide average. Since the year ending March 2022, there was an increase of 0.02 for the WMCA area compared to a decrease 0.04 UK-wide.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Average Happiness Score ³⁵ (annual – update TBC)	7.39 (Year Ending Mar 2018)	7.40 (Year Ending Mar 2019)	7.35 (Year Ending Mar 2020)	7.24 (Year Ending Mar 2021)	7.38 (Year Ending Mar 2022)	7.43 (Year Ending Mar 2023)				WMCA: 2 nd Highest CA UK: 7.39 North of Tyne: 7.44 (1 st) West Yorkshire: 7.20 (10 th)	For the year ending March 2023, the average happiness score for the WMCA area was 7.43 (out of 10), above the UK-wide average of 7.39. Since the year ending March 2022, there was an increase of 0.05 for the WMCA area compared to a decrease 0.06 UK-wide.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Average Anxiety Score ³⁶ (annual – update TBC)	2.71 (Year Ending Mar 2018)	2.74 (Year Ending Mar 2019)	2.89 (Year Ending Mar 2020)	3.30 (Year Ending Mar 2021)	3.12 (Year Ending Mar 2022)	3.15 (Year Ending Mar 2023)				WMCA: 3 rd Lowest CA UK: 3.23 Greater Manchester: 3.40 (1 st) North of Tyne: 3.03 (10 th)	For the year ending March 2023, the average anxiety score for the WMCA area was 3.15 (out of 10), below the UK average. Since the year ending March 2022, there was an increase of 0.03 for the WMCA area compared to an increase 0.11 UK-wide.
	WMCA (7 Met.) Living Wage Foundation Rates (All) ³⁷ (annual – update due TBC 2025)	23.5%	20.8%	20.1%	19.0%	13.0%	14.5%	17.6%				UK: 15.7%

³⁴ ONS, Annual personal well-being estimates – released November 2023. Respondents were asked "Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? Where 0 is 'not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'completely worthwhile'".

³⁵ ONS, Annual personal well-being estimates – released November 2023. Respondents were asked "Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all happy' and 10 is 'completely happy'".

³⁶ ONS, Annual personal well-being estimates – released November 2023. Respondents were asked "Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? Where 0 is 'not at all anxious' and 10 is 'completely anxious'".

³⁷ ONS, Number and proportion of employee jobs with hourly pay below the living wage – released November 2024

3.2 EIU Review of Key Sectoral Headlines, Regional Economic Shocks, Investment, Deals, and Opportunities

HEADLINES	
SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
Cross Sector	<p>Outlook</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveals in the three months to December 2025, compared with the three months to September 2025: real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 0.1%, following a fall of 0.1% in the three months to November 2025. In the month to December 2025: monthly GDP is estimated to have grown by 0.1%, following a growth of 0.2% in November 2025. NIESRs central forecast is for UK GDP growth of 1.4% in 2026, before moderating to 1.3% in 2027. Inflation is set to fall sharply in April, as last year’s energy and food price increases drop out of the annual comparison. They expect Bank Rate to be cut to 3.25% by the end of the year. Yet significant challenges remain. At the global level, geopolitical tensions have intensified markedly. Tariff announcements, US actions in Venezuela, tensions over Greenland, and renewed concerns about Iran all point to a more fractured and unpredictable international environment. Combined with the possibility of an equity market correction in the United States, downside risks to global growth are especially pronounced. NIESR project a modest slowdown in global growth to 3.2% in 2026 and 3.0% in 2027. Growth in advanced economies is set to slow to 1.8% in 2026 (US 2.3%, Euro Area 1.3%, Japan 0.8%), with emerging markets growing by 4.0% (China 4.6%, India 6.5%). Yet significant challenges remain. At the global level, geopolitical tensions have intensified markedly. Tariff announcements, US actions in Venezuela, tensions over Greenland, and renewed concerns about Iran all point to a more fractured and unpredictable international environment. Combined with the possibility of an equity market correction in the United States, downside risks to global growth are especially pronounced. PwC says there are reasons to be cautiously optimistic about the year ahead. The strong PMI print for January indicates that the economy started 2026 on firmer footing. A combination of lower inflation, looser monetary policy and a more stable geopolitical backdrop could provide the foundations for a stronger growth outlook. Although EY says January’s PMIs probably overstate the economy’s momentum, with GDP growth likely be faster in Q1, but this is primarily due to temporary factors. The EY ITEM Club Winter Forecast predicts UK GDP growth of 0.9% this year, a small upgrade on the 0.8% projected in November. Business investment in 2026 is forecast to contract by 0.2%, down from the 0.8% growth predicted in November. <p>Trading Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) rose by 3.2% in the 12 months to January 2026, down from 3.6% in the 12 months to December 2025. On a monthly basis, CPIH fell by 0.3% in January 2026, while it was little changed in January 2025. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 3.0% in the 12 months to January 2026, down from 3.4% in the 12 months to December 2025. On a monthly basis, CPI fell by 0.5% in January 2026, compared with a fall of 0.1% in January 2025. The latest NatWest Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) reports the West Midlands Business Activity Index increased from 52.9 in December 2025 to 54.4 in January 2026, the fastest rise in output in the region for 21 months. The UK Business Activity Index increased from 51.4 in December 2025 to 53.7 in January 2026. The West Midlands Future Business Activity Index decreased from 74.9 in December 2025 to 72.2 in January 2026, with sentiment among West Midlands firms higher than across the UK as a whole. Despite another challenging trading year in 2025, nearly nine in ten private enterprise leaders KPMG surveyed for the Private Enterprise (KPE) Barometer are confident about the prospects for their business. Over 80% are expecting revenue growth, and many are showing expansion plans in terms of new products, services and markets (both domestic and overseas), as well as signs of deal-making ambition. 88% of West Midlands businesses are confident about future prospects: Leaders in the West Midlands have a strong innovation focus, 40% compared to the national average of 27%. There is also a slightly higher focus on technology investment (41% vs 39%), while investment in AI matches the national average (38%). These factors could prove vital to the region’s manufacturing and automotive sectors, helping them transition to new technologies and markets. 2025 was another challenging year for the UK’s small businesses and those working to support them. Small businesses have been operating within a wider climate of marked economic and political uncertainty. This has had an impact on the confidence and behaviour of small business leaders, as well as the people that work for them. The evidence points to a continued decline in some important growth-related behaviours amongst small businesses, deepening preexisting downward trends. Although technological change is bringing many opportunities for small businesses, it also brings a host of new challenges and threats. Beauhurst reports the number of companies incorporated in 2025 is lower than 2024, which itself was down from the 2023 peak. But this decline may not be a bad thing. The continued implementation of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act, including the rollout of identity-verification requirements, has not only increased the administrative burden of incorporation, but is arguably having its intended effect of combatting fraud. In previous editions of this report we have had to signpost the impact of fraudulent activity, which often saw unusual locations as hotbeds of incorporation activity, but due only to spurious activity. So with these extra checks in place at Companies House, we may actually be seeing growth in genuine, entrepreneurial companies. The net number of companies is perhaps our best evidence of this. At 5.66m, projected to rise to 5.71m by the end of this year, the number of active companies is at a record level. Modest growth was also recorded in the West Midlands (1.01%). Overall, UK-based listed businesses issued 240 profit warnings during 2025, with a record 42% citing the impact of policy change and geopolitical uncertainty. Listed companies in the FTSE Construction and Materials sector issued 18 profit warnings during 2025, more than three times the five warnings recorded in 2024 and the highest annual total since 2020 (33 warnings). EY-Parthenon report also reveals that a third (33%) of the sector’s listed firms issued at least one profit warning last year – up from 14% in 2024. Construction and Materials ranked the third-highest FTSE sector for warnings in 2025, behind only Software and Computer Services (30) and Industrial Support Services (23). The latest UK private company equity investment data reveals UK businesses raised £24bn in 2025, up from £23.2bn in 2024. However, deal counts have fallen and quarterly investment hasn’t reached pre-election levels.

HEADLINES	
SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
	<p>Some commentators have interpreted lower deal numbers as a sign of retreat or risk aversion, instead this suggests the market is refining its focus.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women make up 14.1% of the UK's angel investor population. There are now just over 8,000 women angel investors in the UK, defined as women with at least two shareholdings in equity-backed businesses. Women angels have contributed a total of £1.76b in investments since 2015, creating over 14,550 jobs since 2022 in companies backed by women angels. • New figures from Start Up Loans, part of the British Business Bank, show a marked increase in entrepreneurial activity among Generation Z in the West Midlands, with more than £2m in funding accessed by young founders in 2025. • The UK government's ambition to raise living standards nationwide will fall short unless it confronts entrenched economic underperformance in many cities, particularly across the Midlands, according to new analysis from Centre for Cities. • The West Midlands Tech Review 2025 identifies a persistent challenge: a £5 million funding cliff. While early-stage capital flows through mechanisms such as Midlands Engine Investment Fund II and an expanding angel syndicate ecosystem, scale-up finance beyond £5 million remains more difficult to secure locally. <p>Labour Market</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimates for payrolled employees in the UK fell by 121,000 (0.4%) between December 2024 and December 2025, and decreased by 6,000 (0.0%) between November 2025 and December 2025. • Job vacancies and private sector pay growth suggest subdued labour demand from employers. The total number of job vacancies for October–December 2025 stood at 726,000, a decrease of 73,000 on the year. • Meanwhile, the positive headline that nominal annual pay growth is a historically strong 4.2% hides a more mixed picture on wages. Whilst public sector wages are up by 7.2% on the year, the ONS notes this likely reflects pay increases awarded earlier in 2025 than in previous years. Private sector pay growth has slowed to 3.4%, its lowest rate since the height of the pandemic in October 2020. With inflation remaining above 3%, the reality is many private sector workers have seen little tangible improvements to their living standards in the last year. • Unemployment is rising as more people become economically active. Unemployment has risen to 5.2%, its highest level in nearly five years. The number of people unemployed and searching for work has risen by 331,000 over the past year to 1.88 million, the fastest annual increase in unemployment in the G7. • Competition is growing: in Oct–Dec 2025 there were 2.6 unemployed people for every vacancy, up from 1.9 a year previously (Oct–Dec 2024). Adding in the people who are economically inactive but say they would like to work, that number rises to 5.4 potential workers for every vacancy. • The Learning and Work Institute have investigated specifically how many people are moving from one job to another, a good indication of how dynamic the labour market is. The overall trend over the last four years is downwards: around 2.8% of the workforce were moving jobs each year in Oct–Dec 2022, compared with 2.1% in the latest data. This both reflects and reinforces the lack of opportunity we can see in the vacancy data: people are not moving jobs because there are insufficient vacancies for them to go into, which in turn reduces opportunities for new entrants as people stick with their existing jobs. • The current labour market is a particularly tough environment for groups of workers who have traditionally faced structural inequalities in work, such as disabled or younger workers. Disabled people are now twice as likely to be unemployed than non-disabled people (4.4%). This means one in eleven disabled people are unemployed (9.2%), the highest rate for over six years. Since the same quarter last year, the 'gap' between unemployment rates for disabled and non-disabled workers has increased by 1.3 percentage points. • PAYE data tells us where the biggest hits have been to the labour market: retail and hospitality. The number of people working in these sectors has fallen by 2.6% (hospitality) and 1.5% (retail) over the last year. Between them, these sectors account for over half of the gross decline in jobs across shrinking sectors in this period. This is another key part of the youth employment challenge. Retail and hospitality are the sectors where many take their first steps into the jobs market. With opportunities in these sectors declining, there are real questions about where young people may get their first experiences of the world of work. • Youth unemployment now stands at 14.0%, the highest for nearly five years. Yet more worryingly over the course of 2025 around one in five unemployed young people had been unemployed for over 12 months, an increase on the previous year. This type of long-run unemployment early in a persons' working life can result in lifelong decreased earnings and higher unemployment risks in the future, a phenomenon known as 'scarring'. Long-term youth unemployment today risks creating future problems for the next generation of workers. • This comes as new analysis reveals over 700,000 university graduates are now out of work and claiming benefits. The total number of graduates out of work and on benefits increased by 46% since 2019, while graduates off work due to sickness and claiming benefits more than doubled over the same period (rising by 105%). A new report, Rewiring Education, argues that Britain's education system is unbalanced and needs to be rewired. It warns that treating technical education as a second-class path has left both the education system and jobs market badly distorted, with many graduates chasing unattainable jobs as employers struggle to recruit people with practical and technical skills. • Since 1995, the graduate wage premium has declined in the UK, this is mostly explained by the increasing supply of workers educated at higher levels. • Low-income families in Britain have endured two decades of unusually weak income growth. Incomes for the poorer half of non-pensioner households have risen by an average of just 0.5% a year since the mid-2000s, far below pre-financial crisis norms, despite rising employment among these families and a huge reduction in low pay. Looking ahead, the outlook for living standards remains gloomy: the OBR expects average incomes to grow by only 0.3% a year over the rest of the decade on average, even weaker than the income growth experienced over the past decade. • New TUC analysis reveals the earnings gulf between women and men leaves women making over £2,548 a year less than men on average. This means women effectively only start earning from 15th February, working for a month and a half for free compared to men. Women's pay gap spans across the economy, including female dominated sectors such as health and social care and education. • There is stark evidence of persistent disparities in the UK labour market, with certain ethnic communities consistently experiencing worse outcomes. Also clear is that in the context of deepening poverty in the UK, paid

HEADLINES	
SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
	<p>work offers less protection to adults and children in Bangladeshi, Black African and Pakistani households, who currently experience unacceptably high poverty rates. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation have examined how labour market structures and institutions play a role in the disproportionate poverty levels experienced by Bangladeshi, Black African and Pakistani communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The proportion of individuals living below the Minimum Income Standard has reached its highest level since the start of the data (2008/09), at 37.5%. For the first time since the series began, the majority of UK children (52.6%) are living below the MIS. In the West Midlands, 41% of individuals live below the MIS, and 57% of children do.
Manufacturing and Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UK manufacturers are reassessing how and where they trade as higher tariffs, geopolitical pressures and growing border complexity continue to reshape global markets, according to new research from Make UK and DHL Express. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 in 10 manufacturers report being affected by tariffs or duties in the last five years 58% cite tariffs and trade rules, including rules of origin, as a major barrier to exporting 50% point to customs delays and inconsistent processes as a significant challenge. The Green Alliance have written a briefing around trade and resilience, when it makes sense to onshore circular industries. The government is due to publish a Circular Economy Growth Plan early in 2026. The top 200 fastest-growing privately-owned manufacturing companies in Great Britain generated £8.4 billion in revenue according to Grant Thornton UK's Manufacturing Growth Index 2025. Growth was led overwhelmingly by the North of England, which accounted for 37% of the top performers. Seventy-four companies in the region generated £3.3 billion in revenue. The Midlands followed closely, contributing nearly a third of the rankings and £2.6 billion in revenue.
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total construction output is estimated to have fallen by 2.1% in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec 2025) compared with Quarter 3 (July to Sept 2025); new work and repair and maintenance both fell by 2.6% and 1.5%, respectively.
Retail, Hospitality and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quantity of goods bought (volume) in retail sales is estimated to have risen by 0.1% in the three months to January 2026, compared with the three months to October 2025. Retail sales volumes are estimated to have risen by 1.8% in January 2026, following a rise of 0.4% in December 2025. A national decline in domestic tourism is hitting seaside, countryside and small-town destinations the hardest, according to analysis from the New Economics Foundation (NEF). Spending on domestic holidays at seaside, countryside and small-town destinations has fallen by £1.8bn over the last year alone. The analysis follows a new report from VisitBritain that found the hospitality sector in regions outside London is heavily dependent on domestic, rather than international, tourism for revenue. Analysis from the House of Commons library also shows that the inbound tourism economy may have tipped into decline, with international tourists spending 5m fewer nights in the UK between 2023 and 2024.
Digital / Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> UKRI has published its first ever AI strategy which has identified six priority areas for the UK's largest public research funder including championing responsible and trustworthy AI, developing AI skills and talent and advancing technology development. Research has been published by Public First on the value of text and data mining (TDM) to the UK economy as well as the prevalence of how TDM is currently being used by businesses. Featured is economic modelling that identifies that if TDM was not permitted for commercial purposes, there could be a loss of £220bn of GDP to the economy. The Midlands' Defence and Security Blueprint outlines plans to strengthen the region's digital and cyber capabilities, including cyber resilience and secure communications infrastructure. It also establishes the Midlands Defence and Security Industry Council to drive innovation and collaboration across emerging digital and cyber technologies.
Transport Technologies and Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> £50 million has been made available for key transport projects in the West Midlands: including a tramline to the new Birmingham City stadium. The UK Chamber of Shipping has said its members are not prepared for the expansion of the UK's Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) to domestic maritime activity this summer, due to a lack of support from the Government. A West Midlands-based Transport and Infrastructure Campus being established by the government is set to bring together expertise in multiple sectors and deliver regional economic growth. The hub will reportedly support the government's commitment to invest at least £725bn in public infrastructure over the next decade under the National Infrastructure Strategy, while harnessing local expertise.
Environmental Technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new report on the UK's progress toward net zero in the land use and agriculture sector reveals agricultural and land-use emissions have fallen just 5% in 15 years; cuts must accelerate seven-fold to meet 2030 targets. Although decarbonising farming is technologically and operationally difficult, the overall economic cost is modest and the impact on food prices should be minimal. However, the burden on farmers' living standards could be significant given the sector's low productivity, limited pricing power, and financial fragility. New data from the Heat Pump Association (HPA) UK has revealed that heat pump sales reached a record high in 2025 with 125,037 total units sold, representing a 27% increase on the previous year. UK manufacturing also saw a boost as 36% of all units sold were manufactured domestically, which is a 38% increase in UK-produced units compared to 2024. Some 17,000 UK-based jobs are at risk because the Government has not provided clarity on promised hydrogen funding rounds, nor an overarching strategy for the industry. This is the warning from the Hydrogen Energy Association (HEA).

NEW ECONOMIC SHOCKS

COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
Andra Jewels	Birmingham	Manufacturing	Andra Jewels, a long-established jewellery manufacturer and importer, has entered administration following a period of sustained financial pressure. Operations were split across two sites in Hastings and Birmingham . Following the appointment of joint administrators, a sale of the Hastings operation was completed, securing the transfer of 41 employees to the acquiring business. No buyer was found for the Birmingham site, which had been operating at a loss, resulting in 11 redundancies.
Adient	Coventry / Sandwell	Manufacturing	Coventry -based Adient has begun a formal consultation with trade unions and employee representatives over the future of its manufacturing site in Wednesbury . The facility, which

NEW ECONOMIC SHOCKS			
COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
			produces foam products for automotive customers, employs around 100 people. Operations are being affected by a combination of technological change, weaker demand, intensifying competition and geopolitical uncertainty. At Wednesbury , lower volumes alongside relatively high operating costs have weighed on the site's performance over a prolonged period, raising questions about its long-term viability.
Swift and Whitmore	Dudley	Manufacturing	A Dudley -based industrial manufacturer is facing an uncertain future after filing a notice of intention to appoint administrators. Swift and Whitmore has lodged the notice through law firm Addleshaw Goddard, triggering a short period of protection from creditor action while options are explored. Its client base spans small welding supply firms through to major steel producers and foundry groups, supported by relationships with leading global abrasive product manufacturers.
Lloyds Banking Group	West Midlands	Banking	Lloyds Banking Group will be closing another 95 of its bank branches across the UK, affecting customers of Lloyds Bank, Halifax and Bank of Scotland. The banking group will shut 53 Lloyds branches, 31 Halifax and 11 Bank of Scotland sites as part of the latest announcement, including in: Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Dudley and Sandwell .

NEW INVESTMENT, DEALS AND OPPORTUNITIES			
COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
IMI	Birmingham	Engineering	Birmingham engineering giant IMI has been selected to supply specialist strainer equipment for the Sizewell C nuclear power plant in Suffolk. The order is the second for IMI from Sizewell C and relates to additional systems for both the facility's reactor units. The equipment will be used within the reactor's cooling and auxiliary systems, playing a critical role in filtering debris, and supporting safety injection functions designed to protect reactor integrity under all operating conditions.
Brandauer	Birmingham	Manufacturing	A Birmingham manufacturer has made a £700k investment with support of key partner. Brandauer, a metal stamping and tooling specialist, worked with Bruderer UK to specify and install a new BSTA510-150B2 press and associated ancillary equipment, capable of producing millions of precision razor frames every week.
Jewellery Quarter Bullion	Birmingham	Retail	Revenues surged by more than £150m at one of the UK's largest online bullion dealers during its latest financial year. Birmingham -based Jewellery Quarter Bullion, which trades as BullionByPost, is an online dealer of gold and silver bars and coins, trading with private investors solely using ecommerce platforms. The company has reported revenues of £374.2m for the year to 30 April 2025, jumping from £220.4m in 2024.
Ascendant / Thincats	Birmingham	Business Services / Finance	Ascendant, an accountancy and business advisory group for SMEs, has received backing from Birmingham -based alternative lender ThinCats to support its expansion plans. The funding will help Ascendant integrate two recently acquired accountancy firms and invest in technology and personnel to strengthen its national service offering.
Centrick	Birmingham	Finance	Birmingham -based Centrick has entered a long-term investment partnership with PHM Group, securing backing to accelerate growth while preserving the company's independent operations. Centrick manages over 30,000 homes and £4.5bn of client assets, supported by a team of more than 300 professionals across offices in Birmingham , London, Manchester, Gerrards Cross, and Fareham. The business will continue to operate under the Centrick brand and existing leadership.
Dains	Birmingham	Accountancy	Accountancy and advisory firm Hurst has been acquired by Dains, marking the first move into the North West by the private equity backed group. The deal marks the sixteenth acquisition for Birmingham headquartered Dains.
SimkissGuy Recruitment	Birmingham	Recruitment	Birmingham -based recruitment consultancy SimkissGuy Recruitment has rebranded as Simkiss Recruitment Solutions, marking a new phase of growth, innovation, and regional expansion across the West Midlands . The transformation follows investment and the company's integration into the Consort Business Group of companies.
Birmingham Airport	Birmingham / Solihull	Net Zero	Birmingham Airport has published a new sustainability strategy covering the period from 2026 to 2030, setting out how it plans to reach net-zero operational emissions by 2033 while supporting wider efforts to decarbonise aviation. The airport is now powered by a 100% renewable electricity supply. On-site generation includes a 6.8 megawatt solar photovoltaic array on the airfield and two rooftop solar installations producing 140 kilowatts combined. More than 600 submeters have been installed to monitor energy consumption, alongside extensive LED lighting upgrades. Further measures outlined in the Net Zero Carbon Roadmap include investment in more energy-efficient equipment, electrification of heating systems and additional onsite energy generation.
Coventry Coffee Company	Coventry	Hospitality	Coventry Building Society Arena has expanded its association with a fast-growing local business to provide high-quality coffee machines at the venue. The venue is linking up with Coventry Coffee Company to provide a fully managed coffee service for its portfolio of business, sport and live events. After a successful trial, the agreement has expanded and now there are more than 20 coffee machines, each serving with premium coffee beans, throughout the Arena.
S&R Construction	Dudley	Construction	S&R Construction has completed the move into its new £8m headquarters in Kingswinford . The Black Country -based business, which operates across multi-utility services, groundworks, traffic management and housing development, has redeveloped the 2.3-acre former William Press site on Dawley Brook Road into a new operational base. The site includes a two-storey office building that will serve as the firm's administrative headquarters, alongside training, events and staff wellbeing facilities.
Jatt Life	Dudley	Food & Drink	Luxury spirits brand Jatt Life is set to scale its operations in Canada, increasing exports by 400% to meet growing demand for premium vodka. The West Midlands -based company will raise shipments of its five-times-filtered French grain vodka from 30,000 to 120,000 bottles

NEW INVESTMENT, DEALS AND OPPORTUNITIES			
COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
			this year. Working with distribution partner Distillers Pride, Jatt Life has established a strong presence across key regions, particularly Vancouver.
Higgs	Dudley	Business Services	Dudley -based Higgs has strengthened its footprint with the acquisition of Scotland-based Vialex and its specialist employment law business, Navigator Employment Law. The transaction establishes a new base for Higgs in Edinburgh and represents a key milestone in the firm's national growth strategy.
Vabe Wholesale	Sandwell	Retail	Vabe Wholesale, an e-commerce retailer based in West Bromwich , is preparing for its next stage of growth after securing external finance to support stock expansion and marketing investment. The business has obtained £50,000 through the Community Investment Enterprise Fund, delivered by BCRS Business Loans. The funding will be used to increase inventory levels and strengthen online marketing activity as the company targets a significant uplift in turnover over the next year.
Heat Treatment 2000	Sandwell	Manufacturing	West Bromwich -based Heat Treatment 2000 Ltd has delivered major improvements in energy efficiency, performance and product quality following support from the West Midlands Business Energy Advice Service. Faced with increasing energy costs and the challenges common to manufacturers working with ferrous and non-ferrous metals, the company sought expert guidance to modernise its processes. Through the fully funded BEAS programme, Pro Enviro conducted a comprehensive energy audit and provided recommendations that have now transformed the business's operational performance. Following the audit, Heat Treatment 2000 invested in new high-efficiency burners, delivering improved furnace performance supported with 50% matched funding.
Alucast	Sandwell	Manufacturing	Alucast has acquired the Moxley Industrial Estate in Wednesbury for £1.8m, securing the site it has operated from for almost 65 years. The purchase safeguards the future of the three units currently occupied by Alucast and provides long-term stability for neighbouring occupiers, including Kingfisher Enamelling Company and BES Group Testing.
The Arkk Alliance	Solihull	Accountancy	Accounting firm, The Arkk Alliance, has expanded its footprint in Leamington Spa with the acquisition of DSL Accounting. The deal brings an established local practice into the group and supports The Arkk Alliance's wider growth strategy across Warwickshire and the West Midlands . The Arkk Alliance operates from offices in Leamington Spa and Knowle (Solihull), while DSL Accounting is based in Leamington Spa.
Secure Trust Bank	Solihull	Finance	The sale of Solihull -based Secure Trust Bank's Consumer Vehicle Finance business in a deal worth £458.6m has completed. The business has been acquired by funds managed by LCM Partners, a European alternative investment fund manager.
Clarity Group / NDB Engineering	Walsall / Coventry	Manufacturing	More than 60 jobs in the Black Country and South West have been safeguarded after the acquisition of a critical supplier to the nuclear and defence sector out of administration. Clarity Group has purchased Coventry -based NDB Engineering and sister company Cofast from the administrators in a deal that is expected to provide security and fresh investment for robotics and a host of productivity improvements. The business will trade as Cofast going forward and will continue to operate from its purpose-built 22,000 sq ft manufacturing hub in Willenhall .
PP Control & Automation	Walsall	Manufacturing	A private equity-backed manufacturer based in the Walsall is targeting £100m sales with a major acquisition drive. PP Control & Automation, which works with more than 20 of the world's leading machinery builders, is heading towards a record £40m sales in 2026, with the longer-term aim of hitting £100m within four years. The company said this growth will be achieved both through organic opportunities in clean energy, defence and life sciences and the potential purchasing of complementary manufacturing companies in Europe, the US and Asia.
RCF Bolt & Nut Ltd	Walsall	Manufacturing	RCF Bolt & Nut Ltd has secured a £10,000 grant from Walsall Business Support to support its recent investment in advanced CNC technology. The funding contributed towards the purchase of a new Doosan Lynx 2100LB CNC lathe. This investment forms part of the company's ongoing programme of machine shop development and capacity expansion at its shared site with sister company Union Fasteners.
Lloyds Banking Group	West Midlands	Finance	Lloyds Banking Group has announced £2.5 billion of new finance available to businesses across the West Midlands in 2026. This forms part of the banking group's plan to make over £35 billion of new finance available to companies operating and investing across the UK in 2026.
ART Business Loans	West Midlands	Finance	ART Business Loans has secured new funding from the British Business Bank to expand its lending activity and support business growth across the West Midlands . The Birmingham -based finance provider has been allocated £7m through the British Business Bank's Community ENABLE Fund. The funding will enable ART Business Loans to offer loans of more than £25,000 to smaller businesses that face barriers to accessing mainstream finance. The additional capital broadens ART Business Loans' existing lending range, which currently supports businesses seeking finance between £10,000 and £250,000.
Paycare	Wolverhampton	Health & Wellbeing	Paycare has relocated its operations from its long-standing city centre offices to new premises at the University of Wolverhampton Science Park. The move forms part of the organisation's longer-term plans to support health and wellbeing across the Black Country . The Wolverhampton -based health cash plan provider has occupied its previous offices for more than 30 years.

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, Anna Watt, Victoria Tidy, Tawfieg Zakria, Harisiva Govindarajan, and Akshita Choudhary, and incorporates commissioned content from the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) and other regional partners.