

**Mayor of the  
West Midlands**

# **West Midlands Access to Finance Action Plan**

**A curated summary of the  
Access to Finance Task &  
Finish Group findings**



**West Midlands  
Combined Authority**



# Foreword

**The West Midlands has always been a place of enterprise, innovation and ambition. From advanced manufacturing and clean energy to life sciences, digital and the creative industries, this region has the talent, assets and ideas to drive national growth. The opportunity before us now is to turn that potential into consistent, investible success at scale.**

The West Midlands Growth Plan sets out a clear direction: raising productivity, scaling businesses, and building a stronger, more resilient regional economy. Central to that ambition is a simple truth: growth will not happen without capital, but capital on its own is not enough. What matters is the quality of the businesses it flows into, and the systems that support them to grow.

This region has industrial depth and entrepreneurial energy in abundance. What it has not yet embedded is a finance ecosystem that reliably converts those strengths into propositions that meet investor expectations. Too many early-stage businesses are under-prepared for equity. Too many small and medium-sized firms shy away from finance altogether. Too many mid-sized companies fail to receive proactive, informed financial engagement that would unlock faster growth.

From an investor's perspective, the consequences are clear: thin pipelines, slow decisions and missed opportunities, costs borne not only by businesses, but by the regional economy as a whole.

That is why the Access to Finance Task & Finish Group, convened under the umbrella of the Mayoral Growth Taskforce, was established. Its purpose was not to add another strategy or layer of commentary, but to confront these issues directly. We examined the evidence, listened to the lived experience of businesses, and engaged honestly with investors, lenders and advisers. The conclusion was unequivocal: the system is too fragmented, incentives are misaligned, and responsibility for outcomes is too diffuse.

This Action Plan reflects a different approach. It prioritises quality over volume, coordination over complexity, and execution over initiatives. It recognises that businesses face different barriers at different stages, and that one-size-fits-all approaches have not worked. Crucially, it shifts the conversation away from “access to finance” in the abstract, and towards the practical task of building businesses that are credible, investible and ready to grow.

For the Mayor, this agenda sits at the heart of delivering the Growth Plan, supporting jobs, raising productivity and ensuring that regional ambition is matched by regional capability. For investors, success will be measured in straightforward terms: better prepared founders, stronger propositions, clearer pathways to the right finance, and more capital deployed into West Midlands companies with the potential to scale.

That demands a different way of working across the public and private sectors, sharing insight, aligning incentives, and being prepared to stop doing what does not work.

This cannot become another document that looks good on paper but fades in execution. If we are serious about improving productivity, unlocking scale and building a stronger regional economy, then we must raise our game. This Action Plan provides a practical blueprint. The next phase is about discipline, delivery and outcomes.



**Steve Rigby**  
CEO, Rigby Group  
Chair of Access to Finance  
Task & Finish Group



**Richard Parker**  
Mayor of the West Midlands

# 1. Purpose and Context

**The West Midlands Growth Plan commits WMCA to increasing the region's economic dynamism by improving access to finance for start ups, small businesses, and mid sized companies. The current regional finance ecosystem is fragmented, under coordinated, and not fully aligned with investor expectations or business needs.**

The Access to Finance Task & Finish Group comprising senior leaders from business, finance, universities and public-sector organisations was convened to diagnose barriers and propose targeted interventions.

This Action Plan distils those findings into a clear, actionable programme for delivery. It sets out a coherent system-wide approach built around three business cohorts:

- 1. Early stage, innovation led businesses**
- 2. Mature small businesses (up to 49 employees)**
- 3. Mature mid sized businesses (50 to 500 employees)**

Each requires distinct interventions, but all are connected by a shared ambition: to build a frictionless, coordinated, and investible finance ecosystem for the West Midlands.

## 2. Strategic Diagnosis: What the Evidence Shows

**The work of the Access to Finance Task & Finish Group confirms that the West Midlands finance ecosystem faces three distinct but interrelated sets of challenges across early stage businesses, mature small businesses, and mid sized firms. Each cohort experiences barriers that restrict growth, investment, and the effective use of external finance, and these barriers are shaped both by the region's business demographics and by structural issues in the national finance environment.**

### 2.1 Early Stage Businesses

Early stage companies, particularly innovation led start ups with the potential to scale, face the sharpest obstacles. The region has seen a marked decline in equity investment activity, falling from 52 deals worth £153 million in 2023 to just 33 deals totalling £35.8 million in 2024.

This reduction reflects both a challenging national investment climate and persistent concerns from investors about the quality and maturity of West Midlands dealflow. Many founders lack fundraising skills and experience, often producing propositions that are insufficiently investible from an investor's perspective.

Although the region hosts numerous accelerators, university programmes and support initiatives, these are not consistently aligned with investor needs, and their outputs vary widely in quality. Angel networks remain comparatively weak and fragmented, contributing to a perception that the West Midlands is not yet a reliable source of high growth opportunities.

Overall, the evidence points to a system where support exists but is poorly targeted, insufficiently coordinated, and not geared towards building a charismatic, high quality pipeline of early stage ventures.

## 2.2 Mature Small Businesses

Mature small businesses, by far the largest segment of the regional economy, face a different challenge: many choose not to use external finance at all. National data suggests that around 83% of SMEs have no plans to seek external finance in the coming year, and local experience reflects this sentiment.

Among many owner–managers, risk aversion remains a strong cultural factor, with a clear preference for self funding or maintaining business size rather than pursuing growth. This is reinforced by discouragement effects, such as fears of rejection, low awareness of suitable finance options, and negative past experiences. Levels of financial literacy and confidence vary widely, and support providers often over rely on grants, which can distort incentives and create dependency.

The current ecosystem is also scattered across multiple providers and initiatives, making navigation difficult for time poor businesses. Referral mechanisms between banks, Business Growth West Midlands services, alternative lenders, accountants, and other intermediaries are inconsistent and lack the smooth coordination required to match businesses with appropriate finance.

Taken together, these issues contribute to under investment, missed growth opportunities, and weaker regional productivity.

## 2.3 Mature Mid Sized Businesses

Mid sized businesses represent the most economically significant cohort, with around 3,800 firms employing large numbers of people and forming the backbone of regional supply chains. Despite their importance, they are among the least well understood and least actively supported segments of the business base.

Currently, there is limited relationship management, no structured account management system, and little clarity on which firms have the highest growth potential. This means that, unlike in many global regions with strong “mittelstand” or scale up sectors, West Midlands mid sized firms often lack consistent access to the corporate finance advice, private equity networks, export finance tools, and risk management support that could drive rapid expansion.

Evidence suggests that these businesses could achieve faster growth in revenues and employment, but their ambitions are often unmet due to insufficient engagement and a lack of tailored financial guidance. There is also a major data gap around financial health indicators such as leverage ratios and cash reserves, which makes it difficult to diagnose growth constraints or evaluate whether risk aversion is limiting investment.

Without a coherent regional offer, this high value cohort is left without the visibility or support needed to fulfil its potential.



LOCK WORKS

# 3. Vision and Objectives

The Action Plan aims to create three self sustaining “Finance & Investment Flywheels”

## 1. Early Stage Flywheel:

A pipeline of investor ready ventures, supported by strong accelerators, angel networks and sector aligned VC relationships.

## 2. SME Flywheel:

Businesses inspired, informed and connected to appropriate finance through trusted advisors, blended finance tools and coordinated referral pathways.

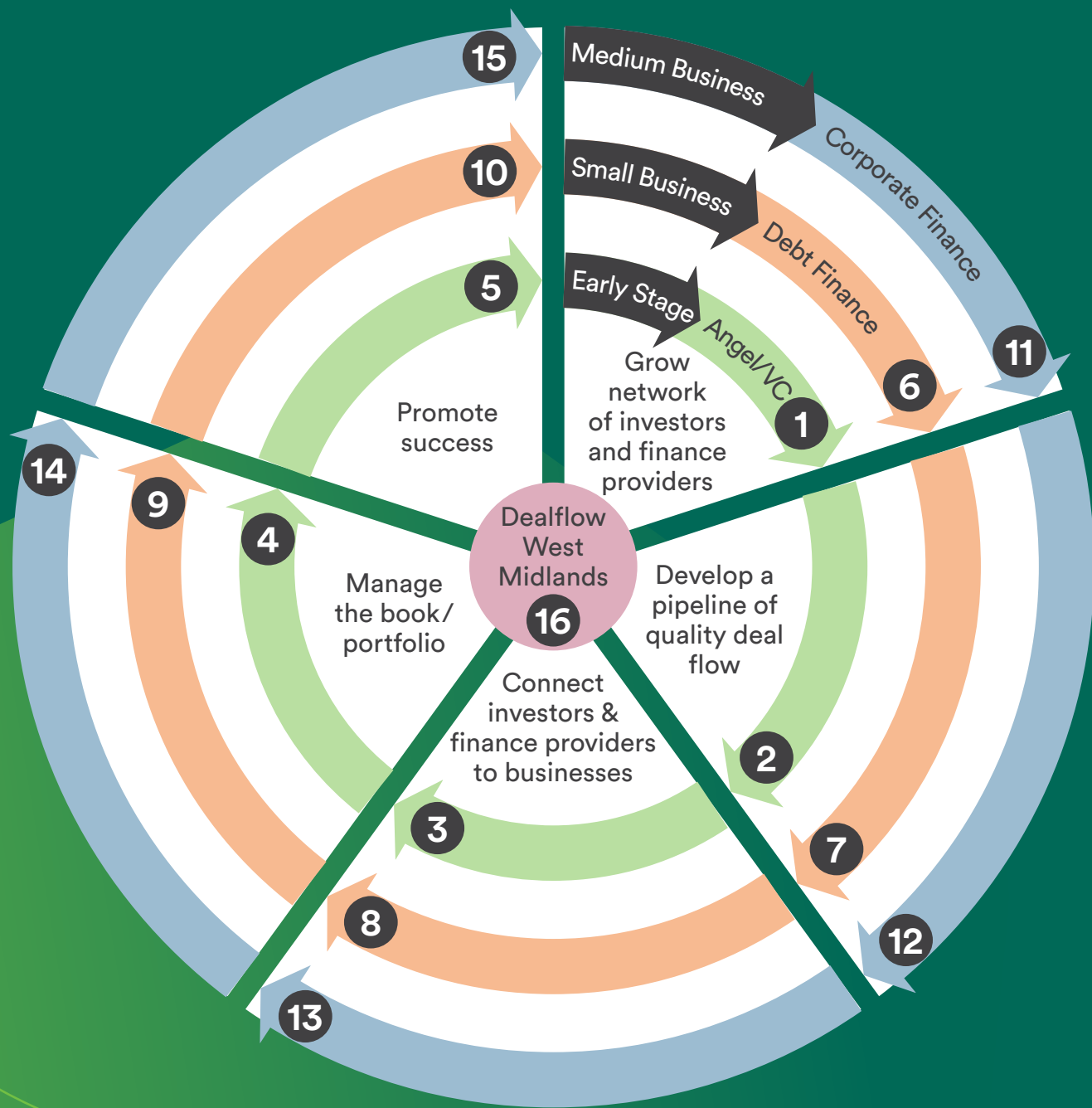
## 3. Mid Sized Business Flywheel:

A structured account management model connecting mid-sized businesses to corporate finance, private equity, UKEF and strategic public investment.

## Outcomes by 2030:

- Increased number and size of equity deals.
- Growth in regional angel participation and VC activity.
- Higher uptake of external finance among SMEs.
- Stronger performance and scale up rates for mid sized companies.
- Improved productivity and job creation across key West Midlands Growth Plan clusters.

## Summary: Creating 3 financing & investment flywheels for the region



### Early Stage

- 1 Cultivate relationships with national investors and build a community of angels in the region
- 2 Focus on 5 regional accelerators to deliver a pipeline of investor ready businesses
- 3 Run regular highly curated and sector-based match making events
- 4 Monitor and support businesses after they raise
- 5 Embed investment raises into regional promotion campaigns

### Mature small businesses

- 6 Promote public-private partnerships Relaunch AMSCI
- 7 Create pathway(s) for businesses to learn about and access finance
- 8 Effective referrals services to link businesses with relevant finance providers
- 9 Support businesses after they raise finance
- 10 External finance campaign Showcase success stories

### Mid sized businesses

- 11 Engage/strengthen the regional community of corporate finance advisors to gather market insight
- 12 Implement strategic account management for mid sized businesses to support their growth and access to finance
- 13 Regular regional events to bring together Corporate Finance and Private Equity community and this segment of Mid sized businesses
- 14 Ongoing account management of businesses that raise finance
- 15 Core data set and case studies to be created and published.

### Overall


- 16 Curation of the regional finance and investment ecosystem

# 4. Action Plan by Business Cohort

## Early Stage Businesses Action Plan

**Goal:** Build a strong, investor ready pipeline and increase high growth equity deals.

	Key Action	Owner	Deadline
1	<b>Build regional investor relationships and Angel capacity</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage 20 VC investors in each high growth sector.</li> <li>Commission an inclusive regional Angel network.</li> </ul>	WMGC WMCA	Dec 26
2	<b>Align accelerators with investment pipelines</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on five accelerators: Digispin, Funding Hero and successors to Clean Futures, DIATOMIC and WMHTIA.</li> <li>Resolve incentives restricting investor access.</li> </ul>	WMCA WMGC	Apr 26
3	<b>Deliver curated sector based matchmaking events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain and grow a list of high growth ventures.</li> <li>Run at least one sector specific showcase annually.</li> </ul>	BBB WMGC	Aug 26
4	<b>Post investment monitoring and support</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide structured regional relationship support for businesses raising investment.</li> </ul>	WMGC	Dec 26
5	<b>Promote investment success</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capture case studies for each investment raise.</li> <li>Embed into “It Starts Here” regional promotion.</li> </ul>	WMGC	Jan 27



## Mature Small Businesses Action Plan

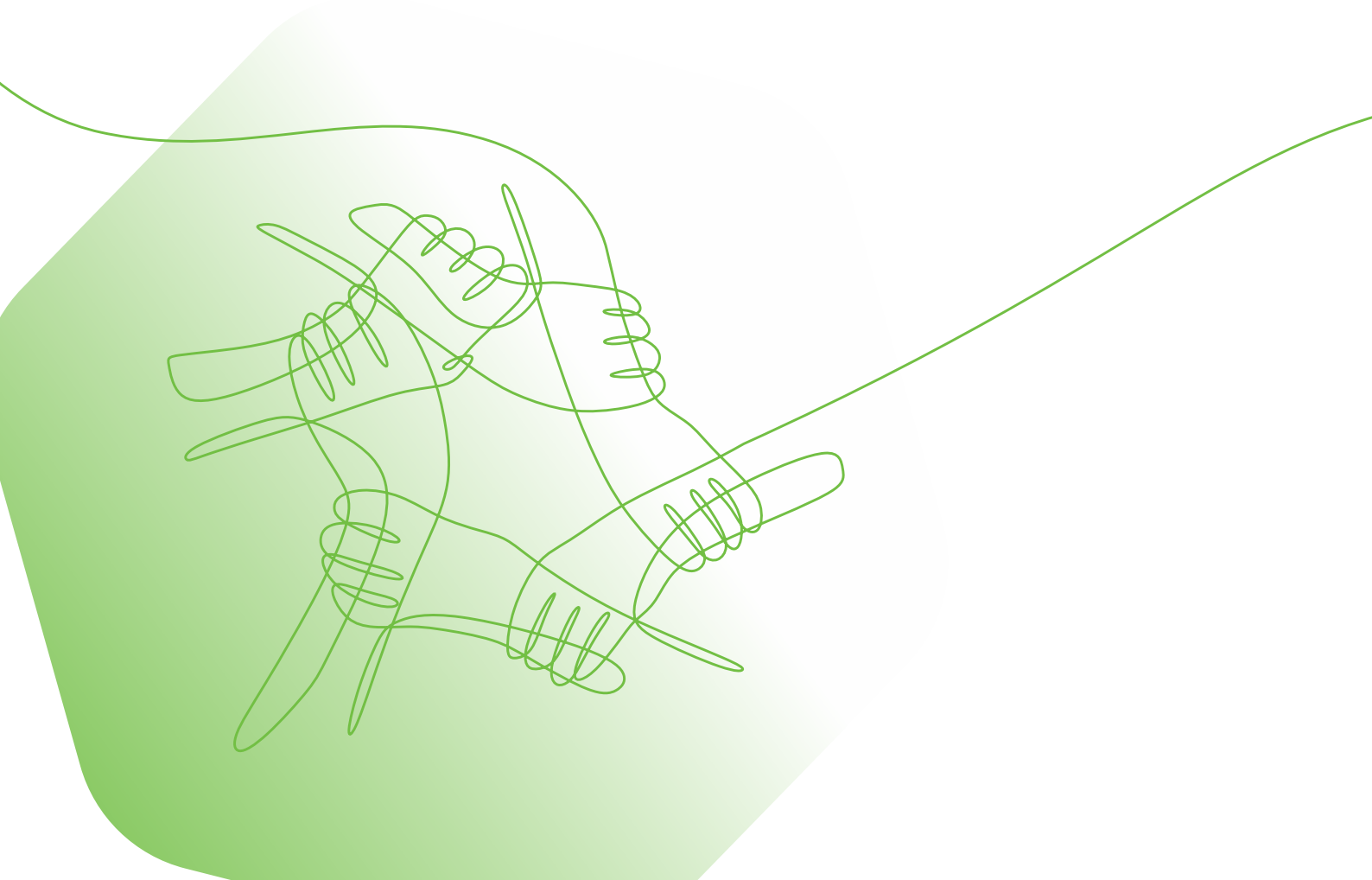
**Goal:** Increase SME readiness and appetite for external finance while improving navigation and support.

	Key Action	Owner	Deadline
1	<b>Promote public private partnerships &amp; repurpose AMSCI</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance BGWM online finance navigation tools.</li> <li>Decide future deployment of Advanced Manufacturing Supply Chain Initiative as blended finance.</li> </ul>	WMCA DBT	Mid 26
2	<b>Create pathways for finance knowledge, readiness, and advice</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External campaign to raise awareness of finance options.</li> <li>Regular programme of webinars, workshops, advice clinics.</li> <li>Strengthen investment readiness via banks, accountants and Non-Executive Directors.</li> </ul>	WMGC ICAEW ACCA	H2 26
3	<b>Improve regional finance referrals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure Business Growth West Midlands High Growth Service includes finance specialists.</li> <li>Deliver coordinated “Meet the Lender” events.</li> <li>Address challenges in secondary finance referrals.</li> </ul>	WMCA BBB DBT WMGC	Mid 26
4	<b>Support businesses post raise</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrate access to finance data into Business Growth West Midlands dashboards.</li> <li>Automatically enrol finance raising SMEs into the West Midlands High Growth Service.</li> </ul>	WMGC	Mid 26
5	<b>Deliver an external finance campaign</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feature at least one success story per month.</li> </ul>	WMGC	Mid 26

## Mature Mid Sized Businesses Action Plan

**Goal:** Unlock growth in the most economically impactful cohort through strategic account management and improved access to corporate finance.

	Key Action	Owner	Deadline
1	<b>Strengthen regional corporate finance insight</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Compile a directory of private equity, corporate finance advisors and brokers.</li> </ul>	WMGC	Apr 26
2	<b>Create High Growth Teams for mid sized businesses</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recruit 25 specialist advisors to manage c.150 accounts each.</li> <li>● Focus on businesses growing &gt;5% p.a.</li> </ul>	WMGC	Mid 26
3	<b>Deliver quarterly cluster/place based investment events</b>	WMCA WMGC	End 26
4	<b>Provide ongoing account management post raise</b>	WMGC	End 26



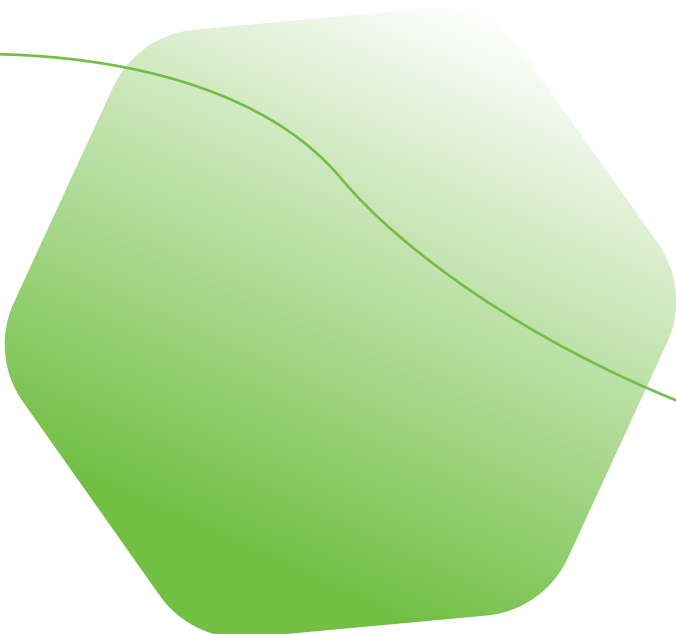


## 5. Evolution of the Access to Finance Task & Finish Group

**The Access to Finance Task & Finish Group was originally convened as a time limited forum to diagnose barriers, gather insights and develop a coherent set of recommendations to improve the region's finance ecosystem. As the work progressed, it became clear that there is a need for a strategic convenor, a problem solver, and a source of authoritative market insight - functions that will be essential during the implementation phase of this Action Plan.**

Given the complexity of the regional finance landscape, and the need for strong ongoing stewardship, the Task & Finish Group will now evolve into a standing governance structure with greater credibility, influence and responsibility. This permanent forum, hosted by the West Midlands Growth Company, will meet quarterly and act as the central mechanism for driving progress, shaping future interventions, and maintaining alignment across public and private finance providers. Rather than simply monitoring activity from a distance, the new group will play an active role in sense checking delivery, challenging performance, identifying emerging system failures, and ensuring that interventions adapt to market conditions.

The new governance body will bring together lenders, corporate finance advisors, angel networks, venture capital representatives, Innovate UK and British Business Bank teams, national policymakers, local authorities and specialist intermediaries. This diversity of membership ensures that the Group will retain both operational insight and strategic reach, allowing it to bridge the gap between daily delivery and high level policy.



The Group will also act as the custodian of the region's emerging access to finance infrastructure. It will oversee the work of the new Business Growth Capital Team within the Growth Company, ensuring that recruitment, programme development and relationship management functions align with the ambitions of the Action Plan. It will champion efforts to curate regional dealflow, strengthen the region's angel and VC presence, enhance SME referral pathways, and embed account management for mid sized businesses. Crucially, it will provide an authoritative voice on the performance of the finance ecosystem, using shared data, market intelligence and case studies to track impact and advise WMCA, WMGC and national partners on where further reforms are required.

Its role will continue to expand as new initiatives emerge, including the West Midlands Cluster Champions, Midlands Mindforge, UK Strategic Public Investment Forum opportunities and the potential development of a future Regional Development Bank. By institutionalising the collaborative spirit and credibility built during the Task & Finish process, the region will have a durable, coordinated and expert body capable of steering the long term evolution of the West Midlands finance ecosystem.



# 6. Alignment with the West Midlands Growth Plan and Industrial Strategy

This Action Plan directly supports the West Midlands Growth Plan's missions by:

## Boosting innovative start ups

Through accelerators, angel networks, Midlands Mindforge alignment, and sector matchmaking.

## Strengthening strategic clusters

Via the British Business Bank/ Innovate UK Cluster Champion model and alignment with WM Growth Company sector strategies.

## Driving SME productivity

By improving financial literacy, diversifying finance options, and embedding intervention via existing Business Growth West Midlands structures.

## Building long term institutional capacity

Through evolving the Task & Finish group into a maturing investment ecosystem capable of crowding in private capital.

## Scaling the region's mid sized business base

Through structured account management and increased access to debt, equity, UK Export Finance and corporate finance.



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[wmca.org.uk](http://wmca.org.uk)

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