



WILKINSON

**Jenny**

*Your mayor. Your voice.*



# West Midlands Combined Authority Mayor

## May 2021 Election Manifesto

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behalf of Jenny Wilkinson, Liberal Democrat

# A BRIGHTER FUTURE for the WEST MIDLANDS

Building a brighter future, by learning lessons from the past, means more to most of us in 2021 than ever before in our lifetimes. Facing the greatest social challenge of the last 70 years, has meant that our personal freedom, rooted in community cohesion, has been tested to breaking point, and, sadly, for too many of us, beyond that.

When we vote for the West Midlands Mayor, on May 6, we are voting for a Mayor to represent the communities across Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Communities that are diverse in skills, heritage, and backgrounds. Almost 3 million people across the 7 constituency members of the Combined Authority, and more over the whole of the region.

Millions of people, across a very wide area, yet feeling closer to each other than ever before. It is this community spirit that will help lift us out of the dark times we have all suffered in, together. It is together that we will build a brighter future, working across the region, with other parts of our nation, and with partners around the world, to build the West Midlands back stronger, fairer, greener, and kinder.

We'll rebuild our economy, moving to a green economy for infrastructure, transport, and jobs. We'll invest in lifelong learning, for all ages and backgrounds, and invest in affordable housing that is as friendly to the environment, as it is to our bank balance.

Together, we will focus on increasing skills and knowledge to improve the prospects of ourselves and our families, whilst reducing the poisons that infect our air, water, and land. We can do this at the most local level possible – in your cities, towns, villages, and streets. Whilst also attracting more ethical investment from our international friends – both existing and new.

If you share my vision, vote for me on May 6th and together we can build a greener, fairer, and more compassionate West Midlands.

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# ABOUT JENNY



Jenny grew up in the West Midlands and now lives and works here. She knows the region well and the importance of building on our rich industrial heritage, through attracting investment, promoting innovation and developing local skills. As a Chartered Accountant and business consultant, Jenny has worked with a wide range of private and public sector entities over her 25-year career, so has a good knowledge of the issues affecting business and the economy.

Jenny stood as the Liberal Democrat candidate for Sutton Coldfield in the 2017 and 2019 General Elections, as well as being a candidate for the European Parliament in 2019. Outside of politics, she is actively involved in her local community, as a Governor at a local infant school, Trustee of a Charity which she founded with colleagues to save and support her local library and on the committee of the support group for her local park.

Jenny says, "It's a huge privilege to have been selected as the Liberal Democrat candidate for West Midlands Mayor. As someone who was born and raised in the West Midlands, I am passionate about supporting the growth of our region and building a thriving economy and vibrant community.

The immediate priority for our region must be to safely navigate the current crisis, ensuring that people and businesses get the support they urgently need. Far too many people see their livelihoods at risk and remain unsupported by the government's measures, particularly the self-employed and those in the live events sector, as well as hospitality.

As we move forward, I am optimistic that our region can play a pivotal role in growing a green economy. I look forward to building a fairer, kinder community across the West Midlands, where everyone is valued and given the opportunity to make the most of their lives."



# My priorities as West Midlands Mayor



**EMPOWERING PEOPLE** - Establish local **Citizens' Assemblies** to ensure that we build a stronger democracy, where the public are fully engaged in finding solutions for the greatest challenges we face, such as tackling the climate emergency and addressing systemic racism in our public institutions. Ensure that the voices of the most **vulnerable communities and under-represented groups** are **represented** in decision-making.



**TACKLING POVERTY** - Implement a **Universal Basic Income** trial, providing a regular equal payment to everyone, every week or month, across the West Midlands Combined Authority region. Universal Basic Income is the best way to provide people with a guarantee of financial security and thereby more flexibility and control over their careers and lives, which is even more vital as we recover from the pandemic.



**BUILDING OPPORTUNITY** - Facilitate **life-long learning** by working with the Further Education sector and industry, to establish a skills development programme to enable an adaptable, future-focused workforce. We will support people of all ages and backgrounds upskilling, and retraining. Implement local trials of an Individual Learning Account, providing £3,000 for every individual for them to spend on life-long education and training.



**HOMES FOR ALL** - Build 21,500 homes a year, including 7,000 for social rent. We need a bigger supply of **genuinely affordable, sustainable homes to buy, part-buy or rent**. The private sector will not deliver the necessary number of social houses; the public sector must deliver them, so we need to work with councils to facilitate increased housing provision.



**A GREENER HEART OF ENGLAND** - A **sustainable** approach to **transport**, which isn't solely about building more tram and train links, whilst making sure **rural and urban** areas are given **equal attention**. Ensure **access to nature for all** across the region, developing new, good quality green spaces, alongside **doubling tree cover** across the West Midlands Combined Authority area.



# EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND BUILDING COMMUNITIES

One of the most fundamental purposes of local government is to support people in maintaining a good quality of life. I want the people who live and work here in the West Midlands to have secure, happy, and fulfilling lives and for everyone to feel they have a place in our communities.

A successful economy is important, because it supports jobs, income, and well-funded public services – all of which matter for individuals' wellbeing. However, the conventional focus on GDP as the objective, not only of government but of society, is clearly insufficient.

People across the West Midlands deserve to have their wellbeing considered and invested in. Wellbeing requires both a strong economy and decision-making that considers many other aspects of life, including support for people's mental health and good working conditions.

People must have voice and influence over decisions that affect their lives and communities should be empowered to have maximum control over their local services. We need a local government that listens every day to people's lived experiences and takes account of knowledge, skills, and experience to make decisions. West Midlands Liberal Democrats believe a radical policy of community engagement and empowerment is the key to building stronger, safer, and more integrated neighbourhoods.

Dynamic, entrepreneurial businesses are a force for good: entrepreneurs, the self-employed and small business form the backbone of local economies and government should support them. A model of responsible capitalism generates good jobs, shares prosperity, and sees businesses promote rights and protect the environment. Growing our own home-made business success and creating thousands of new jobs through active engagement by the public sector in our regional economy is vital. This will drive inclusive wealth creation across the West Midlands.

## As your Mayor, I will:



Introduce a **wellbeing budget** and base decisions for spending on what will improve wellbeing, as well as on economic and fiscal indicators. Put health and wellbeing at the heart of decision-making and introduce wellbeing impact assessments for all policy decisions. Impress upon government the need to include metrics on wellbeing into GDP, when measuring our country's wealth.



Establish local **Citizens' Assemblies** to ensure that the public are fully engaged in finding solutions for the greatest challenges we face, such as tackling the climate emergency and addressing systemic racism in our public institutions. Ensure that the voices of the most **vulnerable communities & under-represented groups** are **represented** in decision-making.



Oppose the government's plans to adopt the outdated and unfair "First Past the Post" voting system for all elections. Also, press the government for **Proportional Representation voting** in local government so that every vote matters and voters have their own views represented in local decision-making. Work to foster the spirit of cross-party and cross-council working.



Empower local people to create vibrant, safe, and engaged communities, supported by responsive local services. Ensure greater links between public-sector-run services and community groups to **increase participation in decision-making** around local services and activities so that these are tailor-made for the needs and wishes of each community. Support and assist new social enterprise, mutual and cooperative organisations, owned and run by the professionals who deliver the services and those who use the services.



**Reinvent our town centres and high streets** to make them places people want to be. Our town centres should attract local people to take part in a variety of activities, including dining, leisure and sport, culture and the arts, entertainment, medical services, and many more uses; they should contain business premises, public facilities, and residential properties, including affordable housing; and they should be supported by good public transport access and improved public realm.



Invest in a **better connected, reliable public transport network**, facilitating movement around the region, ensuring rural areas are included. Measures will include: reviewing the integration of tram, bus, and rail connections to maximise connectivity; re-regulating buses; providing digital schedule display boards, good lighting and CCTV at bus stops and train stations; and **simplified ticketing** (including **part-season** tickets, reflecting the increase in more home working) across the West Midlands transport network, including digital ticketing, "tap in and tap out" and "multi-modal" fare options. Transport is not a single section in this manifesto, but woven into our plans, with a focus on **sustainability, regional growth**, and the **health** of our **people and communities**.



Ensure that more **remote and rural areas** are given **better transport links** such as by introducing "hail-and-ride" on bus routes, a trial on expanding the e-scooter service to include e-mopeds, and supporting people with the maintenance and running of existing vehicles, if they car-share or help to transport others.



Ensuring transport links **serve people with additional accessibility requirements**, such as people who have mobility issues/mental health needs, and provide appropriate **support for neurodiverse people**. Such improvements should be factored into any new build or upgrade, not considered as an ad-hoc item. Work on: **improving access to disabled seating** on public transport (including the option to **book** a disabled space); **increasing the number of buttons to ring the bell** on buses (or develop an app to connect to the bell system); and including information on the most/least busy times at the time of booking, to allow people **more informed choices** about **when to travel**.





**Support small and medium-sized businesses** to grow and innovate by ensuring access to capital, providing a new 'start-up allowance' to help those starting a new business with the living costs in the crucial first weeks of their business, and providing mentoring support to facilitate rapid growth. Provide particular support to businesses contributing to carbon pollution reduction, nature restoration and the growth of the green economy.



Ensure that **infrastructure improvements consider how to build communities**, not just link one location to another. This includes ensuring new build housing should have easy access to (or build in) shops, schools, places of worship, and public green spaces. **Public spaces** should offer **free wifi**, where possible. Offering a scheme of 4G or 5G routers for loan, for **free**, to **students**, whilst at University, to ensure **reliable connections** whilst on campuses in the region.





# TACKLING POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Too many people in the West Midlands suffer from poverty, loneliness, and inequality. Benefit cuts, increased use of foodbanks, and closure of community facilities, including vital sheltered accommodation, all require immediate intervention. No-one should be left with insufficient income to feed, clothe, and house themselves to an adequate standard.

An acute shortage of social housing has created a rising tide of hidden homeless, with many thousands of people sofa-surfing, stuck in overcrowded homes or in temporary accommodation. People are struggling to afford good homes in the right location: house prices are too high and the possibility of owning a home seems remote for many people; the private rental market is expensive and insecure; and there are nowhere near enough homes for social rent to meet demand.

The crisis can only be resolved by building many more genuinely affordable homes to buy or part-buy and, especially, for social rent. As Mayor, I would oversee a substantial building programme in the Combined Authority to ensure that everybody across the West Midlands has a safe and secure home.

Part of that security is protection against fire in your home. All the homes built via the Combined Authority will be built to the standards required for fire safety – to stop adding to the scandalous situation where people in the West Midlands own/live in homes that aren't fire safe. I will review all publicly funded contracts for build, and stop contracts being awarded to developers who refuse to pay for remedial works. Leaseholders and tenants should not pay for remedial works, or financially ruining service charges.

I am proud of our diverse and dynamic communities across the West Midlands. But decades of neglect by successive central governments and councils held back by ideology or lack of money have meant we have not got to grips with problems in community engagement, connection, inequality, discrimination, and increased alienation. All are key components in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Our diversity is a strength. I want the West Midlands to be seen as a place that welcomes and supports our diverse, multicultural, and interfaith groups, promoting social and economic interaction, harnessing talent, and driving sustainable, shared growth for all. I want to create satisfying jobs and more equal opportunities for people to achieve their potential in every borough and town in the West Midlands.

With technology advancing and the world of work always and rapidly changing, skills learned at 18 or 21 will not last a lifetime and it has never been more important for people to continually develop new skills. The system is not set up for this though – opportunities are limited, and people do not get the chance to make the most of their talents. We need to empower people to develop new skills so that they can thrive in the technologies and industries that are key to the economic future of our region.

## As your Mayor, I will:

-  Implement a **Universal Basic Income** trial, providing a regular equal payment to everyone, every week or month, across the West Midlands Combined Authority region. Universal Basic Income is the best way to provide people with a guarantee of financial security and thereby more flexibility and control over their careers and lives, which is even more vital as we recover from the pandemic.
-  Lift workers out of poverty by **promoting the Real Living Wage** for all employees in the public and private sectors.
-  Build 21,500 homes a year, including 7,000 for social rent. We need a bigger supply of **genuinely affordable homes to buy, part-buy or rent**. The private sector will not deliver the necessary number of social houses; the public sector must deliver them, so we need so we need to work with councils to facilitate increased housing provision.
-  Identify and ensure the **development of suitable brownfield sites**. Establish a not-for-profit regional Housing Development Company to purchase land at current-use value and prepare sites for construction, so existing housing providers and councils are more able to afford to build social housing.
-  **Block contract awards to developers who refuse to pay for the remedial works**, on any building they previously built to non-compliant standards, including fire safety. Undertake audits of existing building projects to ensure completion is **compliant** with **fire safety** legislation. Look to **waive VAT on any remedial works that are underway**, currently being paid for by leaseholders or tenants.
-  Carry out **equality impact assessments** of major policies and decisions, considering their impact on people with protected characteristics, such as women, people of colour, older people, and those with disabilities. Use the recommendations from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on implementing **stronger rights, fairer work, and accessible transport** for people of the West Midlands.
-  Carry out more work to **reduce the gender pay gap** and conduct other pay gap reviews for diverse ethnic groups, disabled people, LGBT+ people, and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, considering **intersectionality** across the analyses.
-  Take a proactive approach to improving representation in local government to **ensure representation reflects the diversity of the population**. Make clear, measurable commitments to improve recruitment and retention of diverse political representatives and community leaders. Implement tailored support including training, networking groups and mentoring schemes to improve representation. Work with employers to improve equality, diversity and inclusion in the public sector workforce.





Support young people and the under/un-employed from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, by providing firms that work with schools and colleges in deprived areas with **preferential terms on grants and reduced rates**, driving up numbers of local paid internships, secondments, and business placements. Increase the number of post-school apprenticeships, support in-work training throughout the life course, and develop and fund additional training schemes for school leavers and unemployed young people.



Facilitate **life-long learning** by working with the **Further Education sector and industry**, to establish a skills development programme to enable an adaptable, future-focused workforce, with people retraining and upskilling where needed. We will support people of all ages and backgrounds upskilling, and retraining. Implement local trials of **Individual Learning Accounts**, providing £3,000 for every individual for them to spend on life-long education and training. Individuals can choose how and when to spend this money on a range of approved education and training courses from providers who are regulated and monitored by the Office for Students.

# A GREENER HEART OF ENGLAND

A healthy natural environment, where people breathe clean air, drink clean water, and enjoy the beauty of the natural world, lies at the heart of the society and the economy that the Liberal Democrats want to create. My priority as Mayor is to protect the natural environment and reverse biodiversity loss at the same time as combating climate change.

We need to enhance our connection to a shared quality of life, enjoyed by all. For too long our rivers and canals have been compromised or neglected beyond a few showcase projects. From the canals of the Black Country and Birmingham to Sandwell Valley, the Meriden greenbelt and the neglected green lungs in Coventry, the Mayor should take the lead in the biggest urban restoration of connected wildlife and biodiversity in the UK.

The climate emergency can only be tackled effectively by ensuring that every relevant decision taken by local councils, businesses, communities, and households makes progress towards the net zero objective.

We must focus on building sustainable and high-quality homes that complement their communities, instead of cutting corners and negatively impacting local areas. I will implement an emergency programme to reduce energy consumption from all buildings, cutting emissions and energy bills and ending fuel poverty – and generating employment – supported by investing in home insulation and zero-carbon heating.

Our transport systems across the region are inadequate, meaning that cars are seen as a necessity for many journeys. This in turn has made air pollution – mostly caused by cars – one of the biggest causes of preventable illness.


The transport strategy for the West Midlands should be designed to ensure the preferred mode for many journeys is not the car. It is essential to invest in public transport, improving its reliability and affordability, reduce the need to travel and promote cycling and walking. The transition to electric vehicles and from private to public transport will drastically cut air pollution.


## As your Mayor, I will:




Liberate our rivers, opening up our West Midlands river valley system with a comprehensive management plan to **increase biodiversity** with a **network of wildlife and leisure corridors** linking our precious lakes, ponds and pools, rivers, canal towpaths, woodlands and parklands to create over 100 miles of valley walks and cycleways along the Rivers Rea, Blythe, Tame, Stour and Anker.




 Ensure **access to nature for all** across the region, developing new, good quality green spaces, particularly in areas where people have less access to private gardens, alongside **doubling tree cover** on council-owned land, updating local planning strategies to double tree cover across the West Midlands Combined Authority area, and ensure existing trees are properly protected, in order to store carbon, support nature, aid flood protection and deliver mental health benefits.

 Build environmentally sustainable homes. **All new housing should meet 'passivhaus' or zero carbon standards**, including the installation of heat pumps for heating where possible. This needs government action, but the Mayor and the WMCA should take a lead and insist that all housing projects they control, or influence follow these standards.

 Implement an emergency programme to reduce energy consumption from all buildings across the West Midlands, cutting emissions and fuel bills and ending fuel poverty. As Mayor, I would set a target and launch a programme to **insulate all solid-walled housing** in the public, social or private sector by 2030, with high quality training for those working in the insulation sector. Further measures include:

- Retrofit council-owned homes with heat pumps and high levels of insulation where possible, starting with homes most at risk of fuel poverty
- Help owner-occupied homes to be more energy efficient, for example, by supporting energy companies to provide fuel-poor or vulnerable households with insulation
- Upgrade the insulation and heating systems of council buildings
- Implement a large-scale pilot for hydrogen heating networks, to test and prove the concept of large-scale hydrogen heating
- Trial the implementation of street and local area heat pump systems.

 Invest in the development of renewable energy and energy storage, supporting councils to develop **local electricity generation**, including by identifying suitable areas in local plans, providing skills-training for local workers, and encouraging applications for new installations.







Place a high priority on encouraging **active travel**, both walking and cycling, while reducing reliance on the car. Provide dedicated safe cycling lanes, re-modelled cycle and pedestrian priority junctions, increased space for pedestrians and a 20mph speed limit in urban areas. Reduce the need to own and use a car by managing the location and design of new developments.



Accelerate the **transition to ultra-low-emission public transport**, including:

- Electrifying the rail network – vital as more of our energy network is renewably-sourced;
- Building a fleet of electric buses;
- Trialing hydrogen and bio-ethane powered buses;
- Requiring all private hire vehicles to be electric;
- Pressing for all Local Authorities to allow private hire vehicles to use “Black Cab” taxi lanes to keep more private vehicles off the road;
- Transitioning the councils’ own fleets to electric vehicles.



Enable a rapid shift to electric vehicles by **installing electric vehicle charging points** in shopping and leisure centre car parks and including residential on-street points.



Use Clean Air Zones and Statutory Air Quality Partnerships to **tackle the problems of poor air quality** which lead to over 4,000 premature deaths a year, focusing on the most dangerous PM2.5 particulates from tyres, brakes and worn asphalt, as well as tailpipe PM10 emissions. Consider air quality in residential areas, as well as city centres, where evidence shows a need.



Establish a waste recycling target of 70 per cent, bring in **separate food waste collections** across the region and reduce waste sent to landfill and incineration. Aim to send no waste to landfill or incineration.







[www.jennyforwestmidlands.org.uk](http://www.jennyforwestmidlands.org.uk)



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