

WMCA Monthly Economic Insights

April 2026



**The Economic
Intelligence Unit**

The **WMCA** economy entered April 2026 with softer momentum but continued underlying resilience. Inflation increased over the month, while the West Midlands Business Activity Index fell sharply, indicating a slowdown in growth though not a contraction. Labour market conditions have eased, with job postings down notably year-on-year across the region and claimant numbers rising on the month, although still lower than a year earlier. The employment rate edged down while unemployment rose. Wage growth remains modest, with average salaries increasing slightly, while house prices have stabilised following recent volatility. The wider economic context is shaped by global uncertainty, rising energy costs and ongoing cost pressures for firms, which are weighing on business confidence and investment.

Birmingham's economy remains relatively resilient despite signs of softer activity in early 2026. Job postings have declined year-on-year, though demand remains substantial given the city's size and diverse economic base. Claimant numbers increased on the month but are still below levels seen a year earlier, suggesting some continued labour market stability, as does an increase in the employment rate and unemployment falling. Average salaries have risen, pointing to ongoing demand for skilled roles. Encouragingly, qualification levels continue to improve and the share of residents with no qualifications has fallen significantly. Regional business activity has slowed, reflecting wider national and global pressures, including rising costs and weaker confidence among firms.

Coventry's latest picture reflects a mix of short-term pressures and longer-term strengths. Job postings have fallen significantly year-on-year, and claimant numbers have increased both monthly and annually, indicating a cooling labour market. Employment has declined and unemployment risen, reinforcing this trend. Skills data shows a notable fall in higher-level qualifications alongside a rise in residents with no qualifications, pointing to emerging workforce challenges. Importantly, business confidence in Coventry and Warwickshire remains above national averages, particularly in manufacturing and services, where firms report positive expectations for output and employment. Business formation has increased and business closures have fallen, suggesting entrepreneurial resilience.

Dudley's economy reflects softer short-term conditions. Job postings have declined sharply year-on-year, while claimant numbers rose slightly on the month but remain below last year. Employment has increased strongly, although unemployment has also edged up. Business dynamics are relatively positive, with firm creation increasing and closures falling, suggesting stabilisation. Skills levels are improving, with a rise in higher qualifications and a decline in those with no qualifications. House prices dipped slightly and salaries fell, indicating pressure on household incomes. Wider conditions remain challenging, with rising costs and weaker business confidence impacting activity.

Sandwell's economy continues to face pressures but shows signs of gradual adjustment. Job postings declined year-on-year, and claimant numbers increased on the month, though remain below last year. Employment has fallen and unemployment has risen sharply and remains the highest in the WMCA area, reflecting ongoing labour market challenges. Business births also declined, though closures have reduced. Encouragingly, qualification levels have increased significantly and the share of residents with no qualifications has fallen. House prices rose strongly, while salaries dipped slightly, indicating mixed household conditions. Sandwell also records lower levels of consumer spending, highlighting ongoing economic pressures.

Solihull's' latest picture is one of mixed conditions within a still-fragile national economy. Inflation ticked up again in March, but regional business activity remains in growth territory, despite a recent dip, suggesting that firms across the West Midlands are still finding opportunities for growth. Locally, Solihull continues to demonstrate relative strength despite softer conditions. Job postings have declined but remain comparatively high, and claimant numbers increased slightly, though from a low base. Employment remains high despite a small decline, while unemployment has risen. Business births have fallen and closures increased significantly, suggesting pressures on firms. However, salaries have increased and the area retains one of the strongest labour markets in the WMCA. Skills data shows a slight decline.

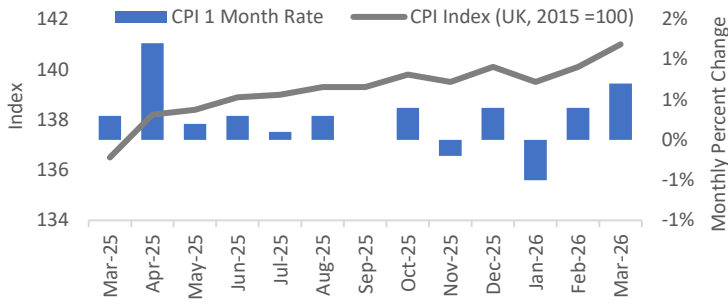
Walsall's economy shows signs of adjustment in early 2026. Job postings declined year-on-year, while claimant numbers increased on the month, though remain below March 2025 levels. The employment rate has fallen, alongside a small increase in unemployment. Business activity data indicates fewer new firm registrations compared to last year, while business closures have also decreased. Skills indicators show a notable increase in the proportion of residents with higher-level qualifications, alongside a reduction in those with no formal qualifications. Average salaries and house prices have both increased in the latest period. These trends are set within a wider context of rising inflation, higher operating costs and subdued hiring demand across the UK, which continue to influence local economic conditions.

In **Wolverhampton** job postings have declined year-on-year, though at a slower rate than in several other WMCA areas, while claimant numbers increased slightly on the month but remain below last year. The employment rate has risen, and unemployment has decreased over the past year. Business demography data shows a reduction in both new firm registrations and closures, indicating lower business turnover. Skills data highlights that Wolverhampton has the highest proportion of residents qualified to RQF Level 4 and above within the WMCA, alongside a reduction in those with no qualifications. Average salaries and house prices have both increased in recent months.

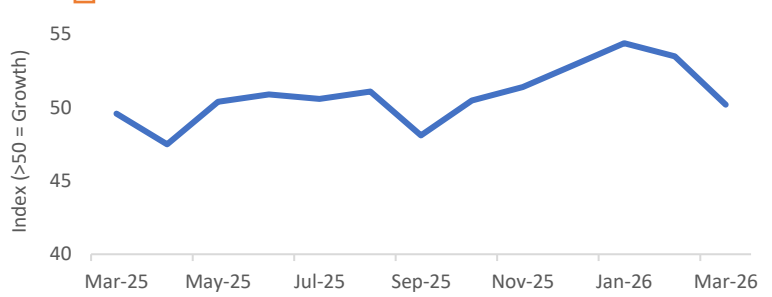
Monthly Monitoring Indicators



UK Consumer Price Index (CPI)



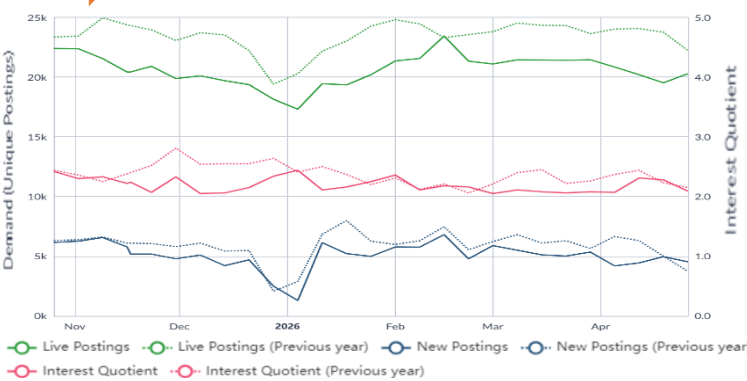
West Midlands Business Activity Index



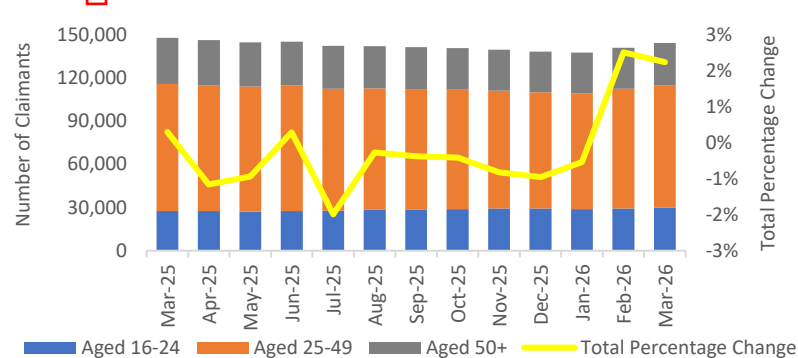
- Utilising a base year of 2015, UK CPI was **141.0** in March 2026, an **increase of 0.7%** from the previous month (**+3.3% y-o-y**).
- The West Midlands **Business Activity Index** **decreased** from 53.5 in February 2026 to **50.2** in March 2026.



WMCA Job Demand and Interest Trend



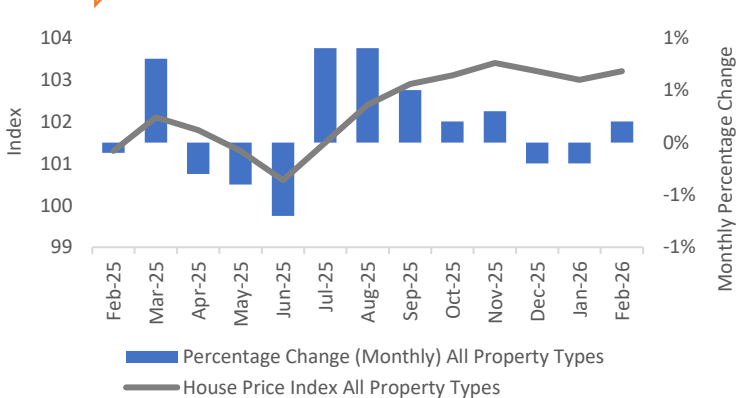
WMCA Claimants



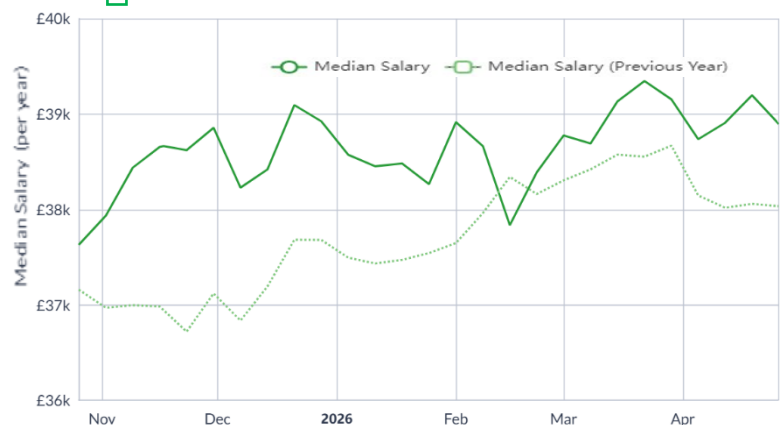
- In the past month for the WMCA: **40,830** postings (**-13.6% YoY**), **2.2 (high)** Interest Quotient (IQ).
B'ham: 23,308 (-11.1%), 12.3 (high). **Coventry:** 4,269 (-19.5%), 2.4 (high). **Dudley:** 2,192 (-25.6%), 1.2 (avg.).
Sandwell: 2,328 (-23.1%), 1.4 (avg.). **Solihull:** 2,875 (-11.3%), 2.1 (high). **Walsall:** 2,179 (-15.2%), 0.9 (avg.). **W'ton:** 3,669 (-7.1%), 3.3 (high).
- In total, **144,120** WMCA claimants in March 2026; **+3,145** since February 2026, (-3,715 since Mar '25).
B'ham: 77,715; +1,625, (-2,220). **Coventry:** 14,035; +520, (+265). **Dudley:** 9,675; +50, (-245).
Sandwell: 15,155; +325, (-710). **Solihull:** 4,810; +110, (+85). **Walsall:** 10,700; +305, (-285). **W'ton:** 12,025; +200, (-610).



WMCA House Price Index



WMCA Salary Trend



- WMCA's **House Price Index** was **103.2** in February 2026. The monthly **Index** increased by **0.2%**.
B'ham: 99.9, +0.4%. **Coventry:** 102.6, -0.3%. **Dudley:** 105.7, -0.3%.
Sandwell: 107.3, +2.0%. **Solihull:** 99.3, -2.2%. **Walsall:** 109.3, +0.9%. **W'ton:** 106.9, +0.9%.
- In the past month for the WMCA, on Adzuna: **Median Salary of £38,626 per year, (+1.2% YoY)**.
B'ham: £40,721 (+2.6%). **Coventry:** £37,674 (0%). **Dudley:** £33,176 (-4.6%).
Sandwell: £34,890 (-0.9%). **Solihull:** £36,043 (+1.5%). **Walsall:** £37,592 (+3.3%). **W'ton:** £36,596 (+1.4%).

Other Recent Releases

- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have released [experimental data on quarterly business enterprise and deaths](#) at a local level, now up to Q1 2026.
 - **Analysis for WMCA shows: 3,385 business births** (-8.0%, UK: -8.0% since Q1 2025).
B'ham: 1,490 (-12.5%). **Coventry:** 385 (+2.7%). **Dudley:** 290 (+3.6%). **Sandwell:** 415 (-4.6%). **Solihull:** 220 (-6.4%).
Walsall: 285 (-12.3%). **W'ton:** 295 (-9.2%).
 - **Analysis for WMCA shows: 3,720 business deaths** (-5.9%, UK: -1.1% since Q1 2025).
B'ham: 1,795 (-3.0%). **Coventry:** 375 (-11.8%). **Dudley:** 295 (-14.5%). **Sandwell:** 400 (-7.0%). **Solihull:** 280 (+30.2%).
Walsall: 270 (-18.2%). **W'ton:** 305 (-15.3%).
- The ONS [Annual Population Survey](#) (APS) has been updated to show the latest full year data (2025) for **labour market activity**:
 - **WMCA employment rate: 69.2%** (-0.3 percentage points (pp), UK +0.2pp to 75.5% since 2024).
B'ham: 67.0% (+0.7pp). **Coventry:** 70.4% (-4.6pp). **Dudley:** 76.3% (+3.9pp). **Sandwell:** 64.6% (-3.4pp). **Solihull:** 77.2% (-1.1pp).
Walsall: 65.7% (-5.8pp). **W'ton:** 71.9% (+6.1pp).
 - **WMCA unemployment rate: 7.6%** (+1.1pp, UK +0.6pp to 4.5% since 2024).
B'ham: 7.8% (-0.4pp). **Coventry:** 9.2% (+3.4pp). **Dudley:** 7.0% (+1.4pp). **Sandwell:** 10.9% (+5.7pp). **Solihull:** 5.1% (+3.2pp).
Walsall: 5.6% (+0.1pp). **W'ton:** 5.3% (-2.1pp).
- The ONS [APS](#) was also updated for **qualification levels** in 2025:
 - **WMCA working age population with RQF4+: 42.8%** (+2.5% or +18,800 people, UK +3.5% to 48.4%).
B'ham: 45.3% (+2.9% or +9,300). **Coventry:** 44.5% (-14.8% or -18,500). **Dudley:** 41.3% (+4.9% or +3,600). **Sandwell:** 37.6% (+24.6% or +15,100).
Solihull: 43.8% (-8.4% or -5,100). **Walsall:** 34.1% (+24.6% or +11,400). **W'ton:** 46.0% (+4.3% or +3,000).
 - **WMCA working age population with no qualifications: 9.5%** (-10.8% or -20,900 people, UK -7.4% to 6.4%).
B'ham: 9.3% (-20.3% or -17,500). **Coventry:** 11.4% (+24.1% or +5,300). **Dudley:** 7.0% (-5.7% or -800). **Sandwell:** 12.7% (-15.6% or -4,800).
Solihull: 5.5% (+18.6% or +1,100). **Walsall:** 9.9% (-12.4% or -2,400). **W'ton:** 8.3% (-12.2% or -1,800).
- [The Gender Index](#) for 2026 shows:
 - **WMCA female-led businesses: 16.4%** (UK: 17.9%).
B'ham: 16.4%. **Coventry:** 15.7%. **Dudley:** 16.6%. **Sandwell:** 16.2%. **Solihull:** 17.0%. **Walsall:** 16.4%. **W'ton:** 17.0%.
- Sports England's have released [Active Lives Adult Survey](#) now covering November 2024/25:
 - **WMCA physically active rate: 57.1%** (+1.0pp, England +0.7pp to 64.6% since Nov 2023/24).
B'ham: 60.3% (+2.2pp). **Coventry:** 58.1% (-3.2pp). **Dudley:** 58.8% (+1.4pp). **Sandwell:** 48.2% (-0.6pp). **Solihull:** 61.8% (+3.0pp).
Walsall: 53.8% (+4.0pp). **W'ton:** 51.6% (-1.3pp).
 - **WMCA physically inactive rate: 31.9%** (+0.2pp, England -0.3pp to 24.7% since Nov 2023/24).
B'ham: 29.6% (-1.2pp). **Coventry:** 31.7% (+4.1pp). **Dudley:** 30.1% (-0.9pp). **Sandwell:** 40.2% (+2.8pp). **Solihull:** 27.3% (-0.7pp).
Walsall: 32.9% (-2.4pp). **W'ton:** 36.4% (+2.5pp).
- New Economics Foundation have published [Land that works for us: The Social Purpose of Land Framework](#), the **framework reimagines how the stewardship of public land can prioritise social outcomes, community voices, and local capacity building**.
- The Growth and Reform Network have recalculated the [Cost of Living Index](#), three key findings; **vulnerable places stayed vulnerable, coastal areas are more vulnerable and child poverty and claimant count are stable, while low pay and economic inactivity are volatile**.
- The Growth and Reform Network have published [NEET Rates and The Case for Place-Based Preventative Action](#), the report highlights **NEET rates tend to be highest in the North of England and the Midlands**, reflecting entrenched inequalities in local economies, transport, and investment in education, training, and employment.
- Public First funded by UKSIF have published [Flooding the Market – The Climate Mortgage Trap](#), where **analysis shows up to eight million homes could be at risk of flooding by 2050**. Full economic constituency-level analysis is available.
- A new study from the IFS reveals [Estimates of weekly local consumption spending](#). The study findings show the **median average consumption is £372**. Local insights show Sandwell has the lowest spend in the West Midlands at £294.
- Sister have published [Innovation Nation: The Regional Engines for National Growth](#), the report highlights that the UK's future competitiveness will depend on its ability to unlock, connect and scale innovation across its regions.

Economy and Business Intelligence

THEME	KEY INSIGHTS
Economic Outlook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The global economy faces renewed tests as the war in the Middle East threatens to disrupt growth and disinflation. • Recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveals in the three months to February 2026, compared with the three months to November 2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 0.5%, following a growth of 0.3% in the three months to January 2026 (revised up from a growth of 0.2%), and no growth in the three months to December 2025 (revised down from a growth of 0.1%). • In the month to February 2026: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monthly GDP grew by 0.5% in February 2026, following a growth of 0.1% in January 2026 (revised up from showing no growth) and 0.1% in December 2025. • NIESR have upwardly revised Q1 growth forecast to 0.6%, as favourable data revisions and the February boost help the quarterly profile, with an early Q2 forecast of 0.4% growth. This is underpinned by a forecast of shallow monthly growth outturns as the energy price shock makes its way through the economy. • Meanwhile, the IMF slashed its forecast for UK growth this year to 0.8%, down from a previous estimate of 1.3%. • Oxford Economics have lowered their world GDP growth forecast by 0.4ppts since the start of March to 2.4% because of an expected prolonged disruption to shipping activity through the Strait of Hormuz. Even if a truce is maintained, it will take time for energy production and shipping traffic to return to normal levels. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They assume that the Strait of Hormuz will remain effectively closed until the end of April. Traffic levels then rise to around 50% in May and June, before gradually recovering to normality over the following six months. This results in the Brent oil price averaging around US\$113 per barrel in Q2 before falling to just under US\$80pb by year end. ○ The higher oil price along with increases to gas, fertiliser, and agricultural commodity price forecasts are expected to push world CPI inflation up to a peak of 4.4% in Q2. While this is an unwelcome development for households and policymakers, this would be around half the peak inflation rate recorded in 2022. ○ Downward revisions to GDP growth in 2026 have been broad-based, reflecting heightened uncertainty, the squeeze to household real incomes, and disruption from energy shortages, particularly in Asia. • Inflation, which was predicted to decrease before the war, is now expected to reach 4.6% by the end of this year, warn some analysts.
Trading Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) rose by 3.4% in the 12 months to March 2026, up from 3.2% in the 12 months to February. On a monthly basis, CPIH rose by 0.6% in March 2026, compared with a rise of 0.3% in March 2025. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 3.3% in the 12 months to March 2026, up from 3.0% in the 12 months to February. On a monthly basis, CPI rose by 0.7% in March 2026, compared with a rise of 0.3% in March 2025. • The latest NatWest Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) reports the West Midlands Business Activity Index decreased from 53.5 in February 2026 to 50.2 in March 2026, marking the weakest rate of expansion seen over the last six month period. Firms that reported higher activity remarked on new client wins, however growth across the region was constrained by some cases of weak sales performance, subdued client confidence and challenging market conditions. The UK Business Activity Index decreased from 53.7 in February 2026 to 50.3 in March 2026. The West Midlands Future Business Activity Index decreased from 73.3 in February 2026 to 68.0 in March 2026, with sentiment among West Midlands firms ranking second highest of any region across the UK (behind London). • This month, the 'April costs crunch' is hitting, which will push up business rates and standing charges on business energy bills, as well as increasing the National Living Wage and expanding Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) rules. On top of this, business owners will face compulsory Making Tax Digital compliance. An increase in dividend tax means company directors will also see a drop in their take-home pay. • The economy in Coventry and Warwickshire is 'exceeding' national trends according to a new survey, despite a fragile start to 2026. Manufacturing, generally, saw improvements in investment and cashflow, as well as the outlook for employment. Crucially, confidence in both services and manufacturing is above the 50-point mark, which is an indicator of growth and puts the region ahead of the national average. • Small business confidence recovered slightly in the first three months of 2026, but risks further falls without Government intervention, against a backdrop of geopolitical uncertainty and energy price spikes causing risks to inflation and consumer demand. FSB's Small Business Index (SBI), which tracks how optimistic small firms are

THEME	KEY INSIGHTS
	<p>feeling, registered at -53 in Q1 2026, 18 points up from Q4 2025's historic low of -71, the lowest level of small business confidence outside the pandemic. That means confidence has remained negative for eight consecutive quarters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A total of 87% of firms are seeing their costs rise compared to the same period last year ○ Taxation remains the top driver of cost increases for the fourth quarter running (58%) ○ At the same time, more small firms are seeing their incomes fall than rise, with over half (54%) reporting a drop in revenues over the last three months ○ Growth expectations for the next year are also low, with more small firms expecting to contract, close or sell than to expand (30% vs 22%). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confidence among firms remained fragile at the start of 2026, despite some small shoots of recovery. The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Quarterly Economic Survey also shows labour costs continued to be the biggest cost concern for businesses in Q1, followed by energy. With businesses facing a raft of persistent cost pressures, investment levels in plant, machinery and equipment, are stuck in negative territory for the sixth quarter in a row. ● With the volatility of oil and gas prices in recent weeks, the government is under pressure to manage the impact across the economy. The shock, depending on how long it lasts, will have far wider consequences than the 2022 energy crisis, and the economy is in a much weaker position to deal with it. New Economics Foundation say government must take a three-pronged approach to avoid a triple crisis of soaring inflation, reduced demand and possible recession. ● Domestic consumers remain insulated by the Ofgem price cap until July, whereas businesses are currently facing the full impact of rising costs. The government responded to industry concern over electricity prices when they announced their Modern Industrial Strategy last summer. They unveiled the British Industrial Competitiveness Scheme (BICS), an effort to cut electricity costs by up to 25% for manufacturing businesses within the "IS-8" group of priority industrial strategy sectors. There are roughly 32,000 businesses in this group and not all can benefit – there is only enough fiscal room to support around 7,000 of these companies according to the government's own press release. The Department for Business and Trade is now designing the eligibility criteria that will decide how the scheme is targeted, and is expected to publish its decisions in the upcoming response to the BICS consultation very soon. ● The relationship between energy prices and investment is not straightforward. Research by UNIDO and the OECD shows that, when energy prices rise, businesses in "frontier" sectors – such as those making transport equipment or machinery – can be just as sensitive to energy costs as those in "foundational" industries, and sometimes more so. A reflection of the fact that energy costs hold back investment in ways that are not directly related to how dominant those costs are within the overall cost structure. This means an electricity intensity threshold will leave investment on the table. Sectors that might respond with higher investment could be left out entirely, while businesses with energy-intensive processes pocket the support and stand still. ● The Productivity Institute has shown that British workers have access to far fewer tools, equipment, software and infrastructure needed to turn their time into output. IPPR analysis shows this 'capital gap' is even starker for manufacturing, where UK capital intensity is 47% below peer economies. This is reflected in areas such as robotics adoption, where the UK severely lags Europe and manufacturing leaders such as China, South Korea and Japan. This is a major disadvantage in a world where highly advanced ‘smart factories’ are outcompeting traditional facilities.
Labour Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The number of workers on payroll remained broadly flat in recent periods, reflecting ongoing weak hiring. ● Vacancies fell to their lowest level in almost five years, but with unemployment also falling the number of vacancies per unemployed person remains broadly unchanged. ● Alongside falling unemployment, the number of people not actively seeking work increased, with data suggesting fewer students seeking work alongside their studies. ● Regular wage growth has slowed further with growth at its lowest rate in over five years. ● Recruitment consultancies across the UK signalled only a mild reduction in hiring activity at the end of the first quarter. Notably, the latest KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs survey showed that permanent staff appointments declined only marginally for the second month in a row, while temporary billings decreased modestly. The downturn in demand for staff also eased, with overall vacancies falling at the softest pace since last May. The Midlands was the only region of England to register an upturn, with the rate of growth the quickest seen in 2026 to date, although there was a decline in permanent staff appointments. ● The Employment Rights Act marks the biggest overhaul of workers' rights in a generation. Compliance with existing labour market rights is inconsistent: an estimated 445,000 jobs were paid below the minimum wage in

THEME	KEY INSIGHTS
	<p>2025, 1.4 million workers in 2023-24 reported not receiving a payslip, and 2.2 million jobs in 2025 did not come with any paid annual leave. The new Fair Work Agency (FWA), which came into existence on 7 April, brings together much of the existing enforcement system into a single body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the number of births in the UK having plummeted from 810,000 in 2012 to just 660,000 in 2024, the Resolution Foundation examines what lies behind this. They have reported that being childless at 30 has now become the new normal. The share of women in England and Wales who haven't had a child by age 30 has surged from 48% for those born in the late 1980s to 58% for those born in the early 1990s. And while graduate women set this initial trend (and remain more likely to be childless at 30), those without degrees appear to be catching up. • Research from the Resolution Foundation reveals the median working-age household will be £480 worse off this year than they would have been if the conflict had not taken place. • This comes as new research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies reveals the poverty rate is 20.59% higher for women than men in a study measuring intra-household inequality. • Between 2021/23 and 2022/25 average incomes across the UK fell by 0.8%. However, this masks stark variation across regions and nations of the UK. Despite this, disposable incomes in the West Midlands have risen by 3.1% between 2022/23 and 2024/25. • The Centre for Ageing Better is highlighting concerns about the impact of this month's rise in state pension age to 67. They are warning that the rise, which begins next week, could consign around 100,000 people on the cusp of pension age into poverty.

Economy and Business Intelligence – By Sector

SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
Manufacturing and Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global manufacturing resilience is being tested amid rising input costs and supply chain disruptions. Growth of output and new orders slowed as global trade flows near stagnated, while input costs surged and supply chains became increasingly stretched. The J.P.Morgan Global Manufacturing PMI posted 51.3 in March, down from February's 44-month high of 51.8, but still the second-highest reading since June 2022. The PMI has remained above its neutral 50.0 mark for eight successive months.
Construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total construction output is estimated to have fallen by 2.0% in the three months to February 2026; this is the fifth consecutive fall in the three-monthly series. • Britain's construction sector may be stabilising tentatively but businesses still face significant headwinds in the coming months. The S&P Global UK Construction PMI edged up to 44.5 in February 2026, following a partial recovery to 46.4 in January, though the index has remained below the growth threshold of 50 throughout the past year.
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 1.6% in Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2026, compared with Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2025. • Global travel faces a complex landscape, with economic uncertainty and policy pressures challenging near-term growth. Even so, steady long-term confidence, major events, and accelerating AI adoption signal continued momentum for the industry according to Oxford Economics Travel Industry Monitor Q1 2026. • The Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD) partnered with Oxford Economics to estimate the cost breakdown of the "food pound" and evaluate how food industry margins have evolved to help assess why food prices are rising. The report examines the cost breakdown for a £20.24 basket of nine everyday food products (apples, beef mince, bread, carrots, chicken breast, eggs, milk, pork sausages, and potatoes) and found that in 2025, the entire UK food industry – farmers, processors, and retailers – earned just 29p of profit. • Thirteen cultural venues, local museums and libraries are set to benefit from a £19.7m funding boost, helping to widen access to arts and culture in the West Midlands. • According to the latest figures, the Premier League contributes £10 billion to the UK economy and around 60% of that is outside London. Coventry and Warwickshire will be part of that now Sky Blues have sealed their place in the Premier League, and it will bring jobs and increased spending to the area.
Digital / Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Social Market Foundation has found more than two in five universities are facing financial deficits. Institutions have responded by undertaking both restructuring and redundancy programmes, and rationalising subject and course portfolios. Digital transformation has been identified as one area where universities could make greater efficiencies with minimal, or potentially positive, impacts on student and staff

SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
	<p>experience. Modelling suggests that universities could potentially save up to £386 million per year collectively, by moving their core operations to software as a service (SaaS) models.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research from IPPR reveals the public are understandably worried about AI, and they are becoming more worried. AI is now perceived to be one of the top three risks in the world, ranked only behind climate change and risk of war – a dramatic rise from 10th place in 2022. This is already turning into political fights in the US as a growing group set themselves against AI entirely. And with signs of ‘techlash’ emerging in Europe, the potential for AI to become politically divisive should not be ignored.
Transport Technologies and Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Camp Hill railway line in South Birmingham has reopened for passenger services for the first time in over 80 years, with three new stations at Moseley Village, Kings Heath and Pineapple Road (Stirchley) beginning operations on 7th April 2026.
Environmental Technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite record investment announcements, flood risk in England is rising due to historic underinvestment and worsening storms. The Environment Agency estimates up to eight million (one in four) homes could be at risk of flooding by 2050. This could make homeownership riskier and more costly, as flood-prone properties could become harder to insure – a requirement for mortgages. For now, this market signal is blunted by Flood Re, which subsidises high-risk homes built before 2009. But this protection is temporary: the scheme ends in 2039, and the underlying risk is growing. Without decisive action to reduce flood risk and clarify the future of FloodRe, the following impacts could occur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nearly half a million (430,000) households could be unable to sell, remortgage, or relocate due to their flood exposure — enough to fill the city of Birmingham. The UK is the world’s second-most advanced climate tech ecosystem, close behind the US. The sector is a rare engine of growth. Sustainable Ventures’ research with Barclays recently found that £15.5 billion in startup investment was secured from 3,300 high growth climate tech companies between 2020 and 2024. These companies support 72,000 jobs and account for 10% of all domestic growth stage funding. Despite this, a ‘valley of death’ persists, with nearly half of early-stage climate tech firms in the North West, Yorkshire, and the West Midlands failing to progress beyond their first funding round.

New Economic Shocks

COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
Claire’s	Birmingham / region wide	Retail	Birmingham -headquartered Claire’s has closed all its standalone stores across the UK and Ireland, with around 1,300 jobs lost after the retailer fell into administration for the second time in less than a year. Administrators at Kroll confirmed that 154 stores have now ceased trading, bringing an end to the company’s standalone retail presence in the region.
Troax Lee Manufacturing	Dudley	Manufacturing	Troax Lee Manufacturing, a Dudley -based metal fabrication manufacturer, has fallen into liquidation with almost 30 jobs lost. Buyers are now being sought for the company’s assets. Based at Kingswinford , the business entered creditors’ voluntary liquidation following sustained financial challenges, including high production costs leading to the exhaustion of group funding.
Link51	Dudley	Manufacturing	Whittan has confirmed manufacturing is set to cease at Link51 in Brierley Hill with 28 jobs set to be axed, following a consultation with staff. Link 51 is the UK’s largest manufacturer of steel shelving and pallet racking.
Jaguar Land Rover	West Midlands	Manufacturing	Hundreds of delivery drivers supplying Jaguar Land Rover’s (JLR) plants across the West Midlands and Merseyside are poised for strike action that could affect car production at the car maker. More than 300 DHL HGV drivers working on the JLR contract in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Solihull and Widnes have also voted in favour of strike action, with dates yet to be announced.

New Investment, Deals and Opportunities

COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
Likewise Group	Birmingham	Logistics	Likewise Group has acquired a new distribution hub in a deal worth £3m and revealed rising revenues for its first quarter. The Birmingham -based company has acquired a second site in Leeds using its current banking facilities. This is designed to streamline the group's supply chain management of palletised goods from the Far East and Europe.
Intercity	Birmingham	Information Technology	Birmingham -based Intercity has agreed a deal to support the mobile connectivity requirements of one of the West Midlands' largest housing associations. The managed IT and communications business is providing network-agnostic mobile services designed to boost connectivity, visibility and management of whg's 300 strong-mobile estate covering 15 live sites at any one time. The deal also includes access to Intercity's mobile services portal.
One Black Bear	Birmingham	Creative	Birmingham -based independent creative agency One Black Bear has been appointed by FlixBus to complete its biggest UK campaign to date. The win builds on a collaboration between the two on a major European football campaign in late 2025.
CBRE Investment Management Ltd	Birmingham	Commercial Property	An application proposing the creation of more than 70,000 sq ft of commercial space in a Birmingham employment area, which is forecast to create almost 100 jobs, has been recommended for approval. CBRE Investment Management Ltd has earmarked land at Midpoint Park for the project. The application site comprises an existing warehouse unit with ancillary offices and yard.
Sertec Group	Birmingham	Manufacturing / Property	A Birmingham manufacturing base of car components maker Sertec Group has been acquired in a £10.4m deal. MK2 Real Estate sold the 111,727 sq ft unit, at Redfern Park Way, Tyseley, on behalf of the Canal & River Trust.
Salts Healthcare	Birmingham	Healthcare / Manufacturing	Birmingham -based Salts Healthcare has expanded its international operations with the launch of a direct presence in Australia and New Zealand, marking a further step in its global growth strategy. The move sees the company transition from an agent-led approach to a direct-to-market model in the region.
William James Financial Services / Clarke Fencott LLP	Birmingham / Wolverhampton	Financial Services	Advisory business William James Financial Services (based in Birmingham) has acquired Clarke Fencott LLP after securing growth funding from Metro Bank, marking the first step in the firm's long-term buy-and-build strategy. William James is an independent business providing a range of financial planning and investment advice services. The acquisition of Wolverhampton -based Clarke Fencott LLP marks a key milestone for William James, establishing a platform for future consolidation in the UK independent financial advisor market.
Aurrigo International	Coventry	Manufacturing	Aurrigo International plc has launched a new UK hub in Coventry which is expected to be capable of producing more than 500 autonomous vehicles every year at full capacity. The business, which raised £14.1m to support its global expansion at the end of last year, will start production of its autonomous vehicles at a facility on Power Park in Coventry . The new site is more than three times the size of the firm's current facility and will serve as its UK hub for advanced engineering, autonomous vehicle development, high-volume manufacturing and ongoing automotive activities.
NP Aerospace	Coventry	Manufacturing	NP Aerospace, a Coventry -headquartered vehicle integrator and armour manufacturer, has confirmed that the production line to complete further Light Tactical Transport Vehicles (LTTV) for the Belgium MOD is now fully operational and accelerating at pace. As well as the production of new LTTV vehicles, contractual discussions also included lifetime in-service support to the LTTV vehicle fleet for which NP Aerospace will use its Vehicle Systems, Services and Spares business unit to provide.
Advancetrack	Coventry	Financial Services	Advancetrack, a Coventry accountancy business has opened a new northern office in Cheshire linked to its continued UK and international expansion. Advancetrack's new office at Electra House in Crewe will act as a regional hub

COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
			for its growing sales function, supporting the firm's ambitions to deepen its presence across the North of England.
Pailton Engineering	Coventry	Manufacturing	Coventry -based steering systems manufacturer Pailton Engineering has expanded production capability with investment in machinery at its West Midlands facility. The latest upgrades are aimed at increasing capacity, improving reliability and bringing more manufacturing processes in-house as the business strengthens its advanced engineering operations.
Volklec	Coventry	Manufacturing	Battery cell manufacturer Volklec (based in Coventry) has secured new backing to accelerate its industrial growth plans and expand domestic production capacity. The investment package hopes to support the company's move from early-stage power cell production towards large-scale manufacturing in the UK. The funding comes through DRIVE35, a £4bn programme delivered by the Advanced Propulsion Centre UK.
Banelec	Dudley	Manufacturing	A Dudley -based electrical control systems and automation integration company has completed a major £500,000 contract for a fan case lifter designed for a global aerospace OEM. Under the contract, Brierley Hill -based Banelec developed and delivered assisted lifting equipment created to solve repetitive health and safety strain injuries associated with handling large, heavy fan case units during aerospace manufacturing.
Jatt Life	Dudley	Food & Drink	Dudley vodka brand Jatt Life has secured a major distribution agreement with its product going on sale across New York and New Jersey as part of a push into the US market. The company signed a deal with New York-based Eastern Liquors, leading to its vodka appearing on the shelves of more than 80 independent stores in New York. It is also on sale at independent stores in New Jersey.
C.C. Contracting / All Seasons Contracting Co	Dudley	Construction	Stourbridge -based C.C. Contracting has acquired All Seasons Contracting Co (based in Kingswinford), strengthening its capability across civil engineering, groundworks, reinforced concrete and surfacing works. The move builds on C.C. Contracting's continued growth and brings together two businesses with shared roots and more than 50 years of industry heritage.
Hill & Smith	Solihull	Manufacturing / Finance	Solihull -headquartered Hill & Smith has completed an approximately £27m deal for a US business which serves the data centre, power generation, and other infrastructure markets. Freeberg Industrial Fabrication Corp is a designer and manufacturer of engineered products based in Escondido, California.
Metal & Waste Recycling Centre	Sandwell	Property	A four-acre industrial site in Sandwell has been brought to market with an asking price of £2.8m. Investors and developers are being invited to acquire the Metal & Waste Recycling Centre in Cradley Heath , which is being marketed by Birmingham -based agency Shepherd Commercial.
Erdgard Developments	Walsall	Commercial Property	Plans for more than 90,000 sq ft of warehousing space in Walsall have been approved, with an immediate start on site. Erdgard Developments has secured detailed planning consent for its Central Point development at Willenhall Road. The scheme will provide a total of 93,110 sq ft in six units ranging from 5,880 sq ft to 26,236 sq ft built to BREEAM Very Good and EPC A standards.
BCRS Business Loans	Wolverhampton / West Midlands	Finance	Wolverhampton -based BCRS Business Loans has been allocated £20m by the British Business Bank to support underserved small businesses across Wales and the West Midlands . The community lender is the sixth to be accredited by the British Business Bank under its Community ENABLE Funding programme.
Reward Funding	Wolverhampton	Finance	Reward Funding has delivered a £900,000 finance package to support the acquisition and redevelopment of a non-trading petrol station. The funding was secured for Linthouse Service Station in Wolverhampton and will enable the purchase of the dormant forecourt alongside a full site transformation.
StudentCrowd	Wolverhampton	Information Technology	Wolverhampton -based StudentCrowd has secured £7m in Series A funding as it looks to expand its data platform into international markets. The round was led by YFM Equity Partners and backed by the Midlands Engine Investment Fund II via Mercia Ventures.

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