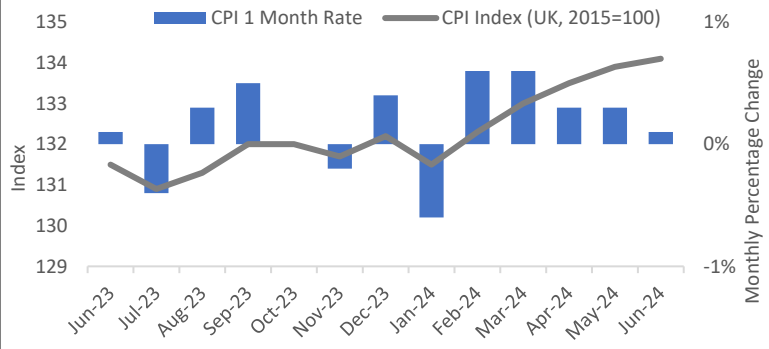


Sandwell Monthly Economic Insights, July 2024

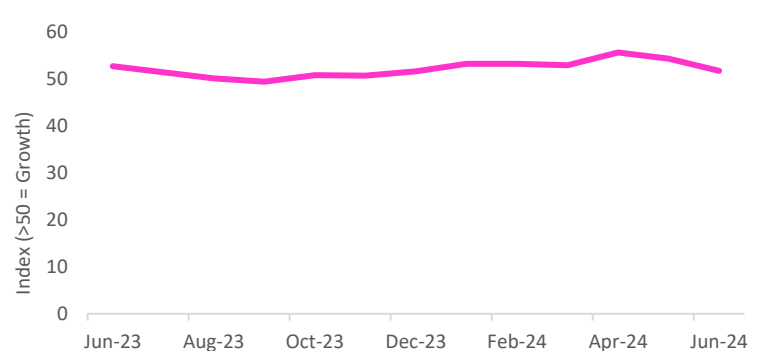
Recent data indicates the UK's economic recovery is taking root, with GDP growing by 0.4% in May 2024. However, tighter monetary policy and tight fiscal policies may limit growth, with nearly 4 million borrowers facing rising mortgage costs by 2026. This comes as PwC predict a growth of GDP in the West Midlands of 0.7% this year. Achieving the new government's aim of the highest sustained growth in the G7 over the next five years will be no easy challenge in Sandwell, with a recent report ranking Sandwell amongst the lowest areas for Business Growth. However, recent data counterbalances this with news of rising business confidence, reductions in business deaths and increasing employment.

Monthly Monitoring Indicators

UK Consumer Price Index (CPI)

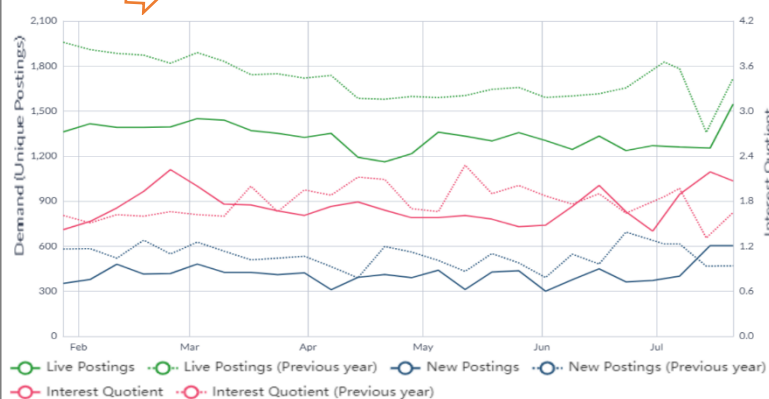


West Midlands Business Activity Index

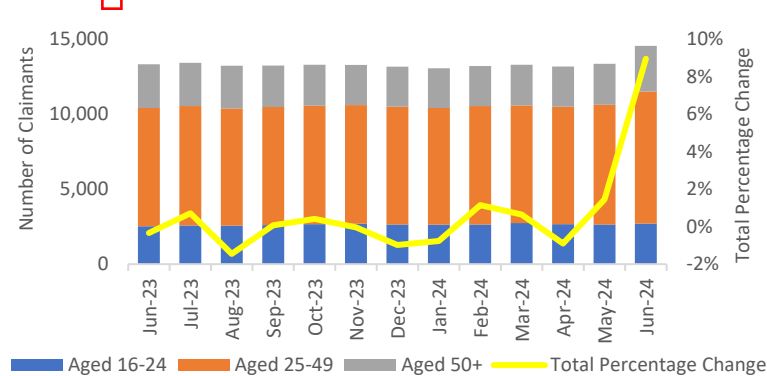


- Utilising a base year of 2015, UK CPI was **134.1** in June 2024 – a **monthly rise of 0.1%**, an annual rise of 2.0%.
- The West Midlands **Business Activity Index decreased** from 54.2 in May 2024 to **51.6 in June 2024**.

Sandwell Job Demand and Interest Trend

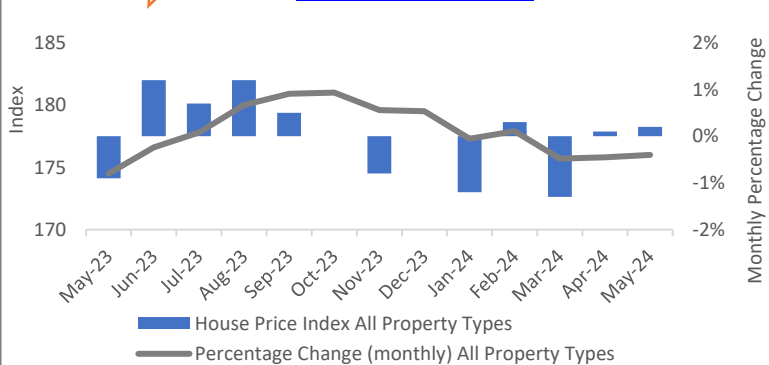


Sandwell Claimants

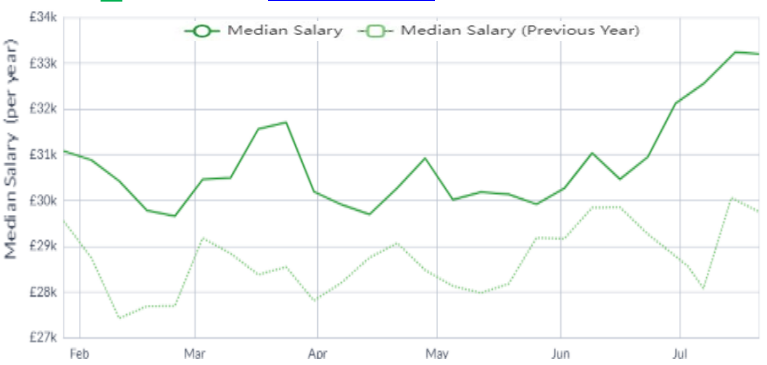


- In the past month: **2,688 job postings (-37.7% YoY)**, **1,335 new postings (-47.3% YoY)**. 1.9 (high) Interest Quotient.
- In total, **14,550 claimants in June 2024**; **+1,195 since May 2024**, **(+1,230 since Jun '23, +3,770 since Mar '20)**.

Sandwell House Price Index



Sandwell Salary Trend



- Sandwell's **House Price Index was 176.0 in May 2024**. The Monthly Index increased by 0.2%.
- In the past month, on Adzuna: **Median Salary of £32,412, +10.3% year on year**.

Other Recent Data Releases

- The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have released [experimental data on quarterly business enterprise and deaths](#) at a local level, now up to Q2 2024. Analysis for Sandwell shows:
 - 415 business births in Q2 2024 (-1.2%, UK -3.4% since Q1 2024).**
 - Q2 2023 – Q2 2024 Change: Sandwell +13.7%, UK +6.9%.**
 - 300 business deaths in Q2 2024 (-37.5%, UK -14.0% since Q1 2024).**
 - Q2 2023 – Q2 2024 Change: Sandwell -15.5%, UK -10.2%.**
- The ONS [Annual Population Survey](#) (APS) has been updated to show data for the year ending March 2024 for **labour market activity**:
 - Sandwell Employment Rate: 68.0% (+3.3 percentage points (pp), UK unchanged at 75.4% since the year ending March 2023).**
 - Sandwell Unemployment Rate: 5.6% (-0.7pp, UK +0.2pp to 3.9% since the year ending March 2023).**
- The ONS [mid-year population estimates](#) for 2023 shows:
 - Sandwell: 347,551 residents**, an increase of 2,969 people (**+0.9%, Eng. +1.0%**) since mid-year 2022.
- New official statistics in development from the ONS on [local employment change dynamics influenced by job creation and job destruction](#) shows for Sandwell:
 - In 2022, **there was a net addition of 1,190 jobs**, with a total of 16,465 jobs created compared to 15,275 jobs destroyed.
 - The change in average annual job creation rate and job destruction rate during periods between 2004 to 2007 and 2016 to 2019 shows that 87% of ITL 3 areas had a decrease in both the job creation and destruction rate. **The change in job creation rates ranged from negative 7% to positive 3% (Sandwell -3.9%). The change in job destruction rates ranged from negative 8% to positive 2% (Sandwell -2.1%).**
- Beaurost have designed a formula combining several metrics to generate a final [Business Growth Score](#), using data between 1 May 2023 and 1 May 2024, analysis for Sandwell shows:
 - Business Growth Score of 5.98** (places vary from 1.93 in both Haringey and Barking & Dagenham to 91.19 in Runnymede).
- The Centre for Social Justice have published an interesting report ([new deal for young people in the West Midlands](#)) which explores the **need for a new deal in education, employment and skills in order to fully unlock their potential and turbo charge the region's prosperity.**

Economy and Business Intelligence

THEME	KEY INSIGHTS
Economic Outlook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new Labour Government has placed economic growth at the heart of their plans for the next five years and plan to achieve the 'highest sustained growth in the G7'. The latest data shows that the UK's economic recovery is starting to put down roots. Recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reveals monthly real gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have grown by 0.4% in May 2024 after showing no growth in April 2024. Real gross domestic product is estimated to have grown by 0.9% in the three months to May 2024 compared with the three months to February 2024, driven by a growth of 1.1% in services output. But the lagged impact of tighter monetary policy will continue to emerge over the next year, with nearly 4mn borrowers set to see their mortgage costs rise by the end of 2026. Another limiting factor will be tight fiscal policy settings. The new Labour Government has inherited plans for more than 3% of GDP worth of tax rises and spending restraint over the next five years, and its manifesto proposed only minor tweaks. But EY ITEM Club think the government will be keen to create room for higher departmental spending allocations. The government's fiscal challenges would be eased if they could improve the UK's poor growth performance. Planning reform is one idea pushed by the government. Raising investment would be another route to stronger growth. Stronger momentum in the first half of this year has caused the EY ITEM Club to revise its forecast for GDP growth in 2024 to 1.1%, from 0.7% three months ago. They still expect GDP growth of 2% in both 2025 and 2026. The boost to household spending power from lower inflation will be the main driver of stronger activity over the next few years, with a less cautious attitude from consumers meaning that solid income growth should translate into a more impressive pickup in spending. KPMG report global GDP growth is forecast to slip to 2.5% in 2024, returning to 2.7% in 2025, while the UK will see growth of 0.5% expected this year, and 0.9% in 2025, according to the latest KPMG Global Economic Outlook. PwC expect national output to grow by around 1% this year, 1.7% next year and even faster in 2026. Whilst the economy in the West Midlands is predicted to grow by 0.7% this year, up from 0.2% in 2023. This will come as disappointing news to West Midlands businesses and residents who were hoping for strong growth in the years ahead.

- The PwC [Framework for Growth](#) has calculated that the UK could have a potential **GDP uplift by £923bn by 2035** in 2023 price terms if the UK adopts a successful industrial strategy. The emerging Local Growth Plans and National Industrial Strategy will be key instruments to achieving this success.
- The latest [NatWest Purchasing Managers Index \(PMI\)](#) reports the **West Midlands Business Activity Index decreased from 54.2 in May 2024 to 51.6 in June 2024**, despite falling to the lowest reading so far this year, this is the ninth consecutive month of business growth. Business activity was restricted due to project delays, loss of customers and slow business decisions. The UK Business Activity Index decreased from 53.0 in May 2024 to 52.3 in June 2024.
- **The West Midlands Future Business Activity Index decreased from 80.5 in May 2024 to 74.8 in June 2024**, the latest reading is an eight-month low. However, firms were still optimistic due to product diversification, expectation of lower interest rates, client demand and marketing.

Trading Environment

- The [Consumer Prices Index](#) including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) **rose by 2.8% in the 12 months to June 2024, the same rate as the 12 months to May. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) rose by 2.0% in the 12 months to June 2024, the same rate as the 12 months to May 2024.**
- Though the [EY ITEM Club](#) thinks inflation is unlikely to fall much further, it appears that the period of high inflation is now over, **which should prompt a steady improvement in household spending power.**
- However, **high wage growth is bearing down on businesses, with [research](#) showing labour costs are the main external pressure on firms forcing them to put up prices and hold back on investment. This is causing issues locally, reported by local business support networks in the West Midlands.**
- **Interest rates have been reduced by 0.25 percentage points, to 5%**, marking the first drop since March 2020, which is likely to lead to lower mortgage repayment deals. The [Bank of England](#) had held rates at a 16-year high of 5.25% since August 2023, as it attempted to tackle rising prices across the UK. The last time rates were dropped was in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, they were slashed to a record low of 0.1% in an attempt to boost the economy.
- [NIESR's](#) measure of **underlying inflation**, which excludes 5% of the highest and lowest price changes to eliminate volatility and separate the signal from the 'noise', **fell to 1.7%, remaining around the lowest levels in nearly three years.**
- Despite this, the latest [British Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey](#) reveals **business confidence has increased, with 58% of firms expecting an increase in turnover in the next twelve months. Despite a boost in conditions and confidence most firms (75%) are still not increasing investment**, with wide sectoral variations.
- Locally, [Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce's](#) latest quarterly business report reveals the region's businesses are demonstrating an "underlying resilience" – with signs of economic stabilisation across several indicators, as well as a welcome fall in the number of firms reporting recruitment difficulties. Similar results were reported in [Coventry and Warwickshire](#) as business confidence strengthened. This comes amid confidence among [Black Country](#) firms grew in the second quarter of the year.
- **Mid-sized businesses in the Midlands plan to invest millions over the next five years**, according to accountancy and business advisory firm [BDO LLP](#), with a significant number prioritising the sourcing of new capital.
- The British Business Bank [Small Business Equity Tracker 2024 Report](#) reports following the market downturn in the middle of 2022, equity investment for smaller businesses has fallen to levels previously seen in 2019, down 48% to £8.8bn. London accounted for 63% of investment and 49% of deals in 2023. The West Midlands accounted for 1.4% of investment and 3.3% of deals. This shows the unequal availability and distribution of finance, holding back Sandwell businesses. **Small businesses in the West Midlands secured £120m of equity investment across 71 deals during 2023, a 21% decrease in the number of deals compared to the previous year.**
- While the [KMPG](#) M&A study shows that **mid-market private equity investment activity in the UK declined by 11% to 321 transactions** in the first half of 2024, as challenging macroeconomic conditions persisted. However, against pre-pandemic M&A activity (H1 2019), **2024's figure reflects an increase in activity of 25%, suggesting the market has begun to normalise.**
- West Midlands SMEs have welcomed the [Growth Guarantee Scheme](#) launched by the British Business Bank to **help smaller businesses in West Midlands access the finance they need to invest and grow.** This will be welcomed by Sandwell businesses keen to access extra capital.
- New data from [EY-Parthenon](#) reveals that nearly one-in-five UK-listed companies issued a profit warning in the past year. Rising costs were cited by more than a quarter of businesses as a key driver behind warnings in Q2 2024. **Midlands companies issued 15 profit warnings** in the first half of 2024, an increase from the same period last year.
- Furthermore, 'Red Flag Alert' analysis from [Begbies Traynor](#) reports the level of firms in 'significant' financial distress rose by 8.5% to 601,950 in Q2 2024 since the previous quarter, and was up rapidly in the following sectors: Travel & Tourism (+20.1%), Hotels & Accommodation (+16.4%), Health & Education (+12.4%) and Bars & Restaurants (+12.2%). **There were 75,144 companies in significant financial distress in the Midlands, and a further 4,918 in critical distress.**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This comes amid new business demography data reveals there were 2,985 business deaths in the WMCA in Q2 2024, and 3,445 business births in the WMCA area. West Midlands (64) businesses accounted for 7% of administrations in the first six months of 2024. A total of 879 businesses across the UK filed for administration between 1 January and 30 June – marking a 16% increase compared to the same time period in 2023 and 42% rise in comparison to 2022. The UK recorded 985 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) projects in 2023, up 6% from 2022 and ranking it second in Europe, according to the latest EY UK Attractiveness Survey. While FDI in the UK increased overall in 2023, the resurgence was predominantly led by Greater London, Scotland and the West Midlands. The West Midlands is now home to the UK's third highest number of FDI projects and attracted 127 FDI projects last year, a 72% increase on 2022 and the region's highest total on record. In Europe's top ten best performing regions for attracting FDI projects in 2023, Scotland and the West Midlands were sixth and seventh respectively. Grant Thornton research reports 54% of mid-market firms plan to increase their company's strategic focus on international markets over the next 12 months. Despite geopolitical and economic uncertainty, UK mid-market firms continue to see the importance of international expansion as a key driver for future growth. From acquiring new customers to accessing new talent pools and skilled workers around the world, business leaders know that finding new markets not only helps them grow, but also diversifies risk on the demand and supply side of their business. This comes as the government announce a new Trade Strategy. The latest Global Entrepreneurship Monitor research reveals that despite the geographical variances, economic shocks generate a rising entrepreneurial tide across the whole of the UK. London's performance post-Covid is striking, with the West Midlands having the second highest Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate. Fear of failure remains a significant obstacle to new start-ups, especially those started by women. Although women are no longer half as likely as men to start a new business (for every 10 businesses set up by men, 7 are set up by women) whilst immigrant and non-white continue to be the most entrepreneurial groups. The ScaleUp economy of now 34,180 businesses, remains vital to the UK in every sector and locality, representing half of all SME turnover output despite making up less than 0.6% of the SME population. This reinforces the resilience of scaleups both in traditional sectors such as wholesale and retail and the strength of our evolving science and tech base which continues to grow. There are 435 scale ups in the Black Country.
Labour Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payrolled employees in the UK increased by 54,000 (0.2%) between April and May 2024, and rose by 265,000 (0.9%) between May 2023 and May 2024. The early estimate of payrolled employees for June 2024 increased by 16,000 (0.1%) on the month and increased by 241,000 (0.8%) on the year, to 30.4 million. In April to June 2024, the estimated number of vacancies in the UK decreased by 12,000 on the quarter to 904,000. Vacancies decreased by 30,000 on the quarter to 889,000. Vacancies decreased on the quarter for the 24th consecutive period but are still above pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic levels. Annual growth in employees' average regular earnings (excluding bonuses) in Great Britain was 5.7% in March to May 2024, and annual growth in total earnings (including bonuses) was 5.7%. The KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs report permanent placements declined in the Midlands during June following just one month of growth. Billings for temporary staff picked up again in the sixth month of 2024 and at the most pronounced rate for over two years. The latest British Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Recruitment Survey reveals 74% of firms that attempted to recruit over the past three months faced challenges hiring, with Construction and engineering firms are the most likely to be facing recruitment problems (82%). Prime Minister Keir Starmer has launched Skills England, a government body aimed at developing a nationwide skills strategy and providing levy funds for businesses to spend on training and future-proofing the workforce.

Economy and Business Intelligence – By Sector

SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
Manufacturing and Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Make UK/BDO Regional Manufacturing Outlook reports significant job boosts across the devolved nations' respective manufacturing sectors. The West Midlands performance across the key indicators of manufacturing activity is quite mixed. Whilst there are no superstar performances, the region matched its average balance for order books growth compared to last year, reporting at +23%. This is followed by the reporting for investment intentions which finds that an average balance of +22% of manufacturers indicate they plan to increase their capital expenditure. This is unsurprising, given the region's dominance to automotive and mechanical equipment manufacturers that are investing heavily in new technologies, such as electrification and clean energy solutions.

SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AND Digital, TechWM, and more have teamed up to help West Midlands manufacturers introduce AI to their operations. The AI Adoption Acceleration Programme will welcome eight businesses from across the West Midlands looking to enhance their technological integrations. • Optimism among manufacturers fell slightly in July, after rising in April for the first time in nearly three years, according to the CBI's latest quarterly Industrial Trends Survey. Output volumes were broadly unchanged in the quarter to July, following a similar result in the three months to June, and under-performed expectations for modest growth. However, manufacturers continue to expect output to increase over the next three months, with growth expectations the strongest since March 2022.
Retail, Hospitality and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail sales volumes (quantity bought) are estimated to have fallen by 1.2% in June 2024, following a rise of 2.9% in May 2024. Sales volumes fell across most sectors, with department stores and clothing retailers broadly returning to their Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2024 levels. • The British Beer and Pub Association estimates that almost 20 million more pints have been enjoyed during the Euros, valued at more than £93 million in extra sales, bringing a welcome boost to Midlands pubs. • In spite of craft beer companies facing notable challenges in recent years, the wider brewing industry is still doing well and the industry has seen a steady increase in active companies over the past decade, which at the end of 2023 reached 1,623. However, there has been a drop in the investment being made into breweries in 2023. • Beauhurst have investigated the most valuable suppliers and manufacturers in sportswear, equipment, and activetech. The West Midlands is home to 151 companies, (8% of the UK total), and home to GymShark which is worth over £1bn and has contributed £87.5m to the UK economy. • More people visited the West Midlands in 2023 than ever before, according to new data from the West Midlands Growth Company, with more than 145 million people spending time in the region. The record-breaking figure of 145.4 million represents an increase of more than four million people (3%) compared to data from 2022, when the region hosted the Commonwealth Games. The visitor economy in the West Midlands is now worth £16.bn, up £2.2bn (15%). The number of jobs supported by tourism in 2023 reached 143,988, the highest figure recorded and the most since Covid-19 restrictions were introduced in 2020.
Construction	<p>Monthly construction output is estimated to have grown by 1.9% in volume terms in May 2024; this follows a fall of 1.1% in April 2024 (revised from a fall of 1.4%). The increase in monthly output came from increases in both new work (2.7%), and repair and maintenance (0.8%); anecdotal evidence from survey returns noted that warmer weather contributed to increased output in May.</p>
Tech / Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UK and 90 other countries have negotiated a set of new rules designed to make global trade faster, fairer, cheaper and more secure. Once in force the E-Commerce Joint Initiative will permanently ban customs duties on digital content, lower costs for UK businesses and help protect UK consumers from online fraud. • The majority of SMEs are still not using artificial intelligence, despite a growing acceptance by businesses that it will help boost productivity. Research carried out by the British Chambers of Commerce reveals 43% of firms have no plans to use AI technology.
Transport Technologies and Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of passengers coming through Birmingham Airport last month was up 12% on June 2023. The airport handled 1,265,262 people arriving and departing over the course of June, despite being hit by problems of long delays through security this summer. • In a bid to support aerospace research and development (R&D) projects for sustainable travel, the UK Government has announced more than £100m in funding for new-technology projects such as zero-emission hydrogen flight and sustainable propulsion systems. The funding will be delivered through the Aerospace Technology Institute (ATI) Programme for five aerospace R&D projects. • Rolls-Royce has launched a new research programme, in collaboration with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), to explore the use of hydrogen as a zero-carbon aviation fuel. This initiative aims to address three present challenges to using hydrogen as a low-carbon aviation fuel, including fuel combustion, fuel delivery and fuel systems integration with an engine.
Environmental Technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The latest Climate Change Committee's (CCC) annual progress report to the UK Parliament on its net-zero transition emphasises that only one-third of the emissions reductions the UK must deliver to achieve its legally binding 2030s targets are backed with credible policies, with particularly weak plans in sectors other than electricity generation. The UK's new Labour government must urgently reinstate the net-zero plans shelved by its predecessor in order to "limit the damage" caused by the previous government's policy rollbacks. • Planning barriers to onshore wind development have been lifted by the new Government. However, challenges with supply chains and skilled workers remain. Developers are also grappling with supply chain inflation and grid connection delays.

SECTOR	KEY INSIGHTS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great British Energy have announced plans to use British seabed owned by the Crown Estate to build windfarms. New research in Oxera's 'Growth Zero: Reframing net zero as a driver of growth' report has found that 'supercharging' net-zero policies could unlock nearly £765bn between now and net-zero, while accelerating decarbonisation in line with legally binding targets.

NEW ECONOMIC SHOCKS			
COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
Hawes Lane GP Surgery	Sandwell	Healthcare	Hawes Lane GP Surgery has abruptly closed due to bankruptcy, leaving its 4,000 patients without permanent doctors.
Carpetright	Oldbury/ Wednesbury	Retail	The closure of multiple Carpetright stores has been announced and redundancies have been made. Branches in Wednesbury and Oldbury have closed. Carpetright has been bought in a rescue deal by rival Tapi Carpets, but the stores in Oldbury and Wednesbury are not on the list of those bought by Tapi.

NEW INVESTMENT, DEALS AND OPPORTUNITIES			
COMPANY	LOCATION	SECTOR	DETAIL
West Midlands Combined Authority	West Midlands wide	Culture	The West Midlands Combined Authority has launched its £1 million Activate programme, which will run for two years offering a package of business support aimed at helping cultural creative organisations develop.
Invictus Games	Birmingham, but also region-wide	Sports	Birmingham has won its bid to be the host city of the July 2027 Invictus Games, with hopes it will bring economic benefits and visitors to the region.
Sandwell College/ Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust	Sandwell	Healthcare	Sandwell College and Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust have signed an agreement which is expected to secure hundreds of job and training opportunities for people in the region each year. The deal centres on a new £18m Learning Campus in Smethwick, which is set to open as part of the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital site in 2025.