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Chief Executive's Directorate Communications Team

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### **£150million boost for Coventry city centre in devo offer to West Midlands**

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A massive cash boost of £150million to speed up the regeneration of Coventry city centre has been negotiated by the Leader of Coventry City Council as part of an £8billion proposed devolution (devo) deal for the West Midlands.

Council leaders across the West Midlands will spend the next few weeks working through the detail of the offer from government which could see the region taking over a number of powers, including public transport, from central government. Councils will make a final decision on whether to accept the deal in January.

The devo deal being offered to the West Midlands – the biggest so far negotiated by a region - could also see Coventry benefit from a £370million package of transport schemes, alongside a £48million sprint bus link to the HS2/UK Central station which will be just six miles from Coventry when complete. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) could also take control of buses across the region.

If the Council agrees to the deal it will also get access to wider pots for transport, housing, business investment, land reclamation, business support and employment, education and skills.

The £150million bonus for the city centre would help deliver significant new office development at the Friargate ahead of schedule. It will also provide the funding to accelerate the Council's city centre redevelopment scheme which will see new shops – including a high profile anchor store – and restaurants developed next to the new leisure centre to be built on the current site of council offices in Greyfriars Lane. Work could get underway on both projects as early as next summer.

Coventry City Council Leader, Cllr Ann Lucas said: "I've always been absolutely clear that the offer from government had to be good enough for Coventry – or we would walk away.

"I think, after some tough negotiations over the past few weeks, this offer now has

some huge benefits for Coventry residents that mean it's worth us signing up to the deal.

"I'm pleased the other Leaders on the WMCA understand the importance of making sure we crack on with regeneration and development in our city centre and have agreed it needs to be a key part of any deal we could agree with government.

"Coventry on its own could not have raised the money itself to achieve the level of investment in the city across a number of areas now being proposed.

"We have looked long and hard at what we're being offered and we think it's the best deal that could be struck with government.

"I've also been absolutely clear with government and colleagues across the West Midlands we need a number of safeguards in the way the new combined authority works like the need for leaders to agree unanimously when they make major decisions.

"We know that this was one of the issues Coventry residents have been concerned about – that Coventry could be outvoted by other councils – so this will ensure this can't happen.

"But we are not rushing into this. We want to spend the next few weeks working through the detail, talking to local people and key partners like the business community so everyone understands what's on offer and what the future looks like if we don't do a devo deal with government."

As part of the proposals the government wants the region to have an elected metro mayor. The metro mayor would have control of some of the powers handed over to the West Midlands by Whitehall as part of the devo deal - not the powers currently held by leaders and their councils and they would not be responsible for councils or their services.

They would also take the powers and role of the existing West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner – this role would be abolished. This, along with the abolition of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority and the transfer of Centro to the WMCA, will help to reduce any additional costs of a metro mayor.

A metro mayor for the West Midlands would chair a cabinet made up of the leaders of the seven metropolitan councils in the WMCA. Each leader would have responsibility for a different policy area and all would have one vote when it came to taking decisions.

Meanwhile they will continue to run their own councils with the support of their councillors, retaining the leadership powers they currently have. Leaders will not receive any additional payment for undertaking WMCA duties.

Residents in the seven metropolitan councils would have a vote for the elected mayor.

Ends

The WMCA – which will officially come into existence next April – could also get improved planning powers for housing, the power to review adult and skills funding and, working with the government, redesign the employment service.

Funding has also been allocated for new business support programmes alongside a commitment to deliver wider public sector reform including mental health and youth justice across the area.

The deal sees a £4.4billion investment strategy on offer to the West Midlands to ensure every area of the region benefits from HS2, including investment in the HS2/UK Central interchange six miles from Coventry, the new railway station in Birmingham for HS2 at Curzon Street and an expansion of the metro network to the Black Country and HS2 stations. It will mean that nowhere in the West Midlands is more than 40 minutes from a HS2 station.

There will be an additional transport investment of £1.67billion in the area to improve transport links from Coventry to the new HS2/UK Central interchange and within the city and to fund other transport investment and highways maintenance of the key route network in the West Midlands.

A £500million housing investment fund will support the development of new homes and a £200million land remediation fund will enable brownfield land to be brought back into use for housing and employment.

A £1billion fund will be available for companies in the West Midlands to help them further invest in their businesses so they can grow successfully.

£50million will be invested in a new innovation centre which will build on the strong track record of innovation and invention in the West Midlands.

There will be a £20million fund to launch an employment, education and skills programme for the West Midlands. This will provide more tailored and focused employment support so people have the right skills for the jobs on offer.

**Issued by: Gareth Lewis on 024 7683 4857**