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east midlands chamber
Derbyshire | Leicestershire | Nottinghamshire

East Midlands Chamber (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire)

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Framework for Growth

Unlocking Growth in the East Midlands

east midlands chamber
Derbyshire | Leicestershire | Nottinghamshire

East Midlands Chamber is the leading business representation organisation for Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, working with more than 12,000 businesses each year. Our mission is to help our businesses and communities by providing them with the very best support, skills development, international trade services and fact-based advocacy.

Through research, lobbying and collaboration with our local and national partners, we ensure the voice of business is heard in decision-making at all political levels. Independent, non-profit and member-led, the Chamber plays a key role in driving growth, innovation and long-term resilience across the East Midlands.

About Us

Following the launch of our 2025-28 business plan, we have already:

Supported hundreds

of businesses through high-quality courses and webinars

Secured £6m

of private and public funded grants for business

Hosted conferences

covering everything from people and skills to AI, sustainability and energy

Worked closely

with councillors, MPs and business leaders to shape UK industrial and economic policy

East Midlands Chamber Chief Executive and Chair Introduction

East Midlands Chamber Board

The East Midlands is at a pivotal moment in its history. Political change nationally, regionally, and locally, with the emergence of Strategic Mayoral Authorities as the primary vehicle of regional investment from the centre in Westminster, a reset of international trade and post pandemic markets due to ongoing international conflicts, and uncertainty about the landscape in which businesses will operate have all created significant challenges for the business community.

In the face of such uncertainty, our world class East Midlands businesses have always demonstrated their resilience, adaptability, and ability to create opportunities emerging from these challenges. However, the currency of business is confidence, and this document sets out what Government needs to implement to create confidence and growth.

Essentially, our Framework For Growth, based upon insight from Members, sets out the East Midlands business community's asks from Government to unlock barriers to growth for Skills, Transport, Connectivity, Innovation, and Investment.

Scott Knowles, Chief Executive

It gives me great pride to introduce Framework for Growth, our shared vision to deliver stronger and more sustainable economic growth across the East Midlands.

Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, businesses large and small are driving innovation, creating good jobs and shaping the industries of the future and this framework captures the energy, ambition and resilience that define our region.

A region built on collaboration, creativity and enterprise. Together, through partnership and purpose, we can turn opportunity into growth, build a thriving and sustainable economy, and ensure that every community benefits from the success of the East Midlands

Kevin Harris, Chair of the Board

Unlocking the East Midlands Economy – Delivering the UK Modern Industrial Strategy

The East Midlands is driven by a vibrant community of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) whose agility, innovation and specialist expertise strengthen supply chains. These SMEs play a central role in powering key sectors including manufacturing, aerospace, rail, automotive, life sciences, creative and digital, and logistics. Their impact is reinforced through close collaboration with the region's world-class higher and further education institutions, providing cutting-edge research, skills, and talent.

Alongside this strong SME base, the region is home to a wide range of global businesses including Toyota, Rolls-Royce, Capital One, Alstom and Samworth Brothers, supported by nationally significant innovation assets. Together, they form an economy of over 3.3 million people and 116,000 businesses across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, generating more than £75 billion for the UK and sustaining around 1.6 million jobs.

The Power of East Midlands Industries

Digital & Creative:

The East Midlands' digital and creative industries are thriving, driven by a growing network of innovative SMEs that fuse technology, design, and data to power business growth. The region is home to agile software developers, data specialists, and creative studios working with national and global clients to deliver cutting-edge digital solutions, immersive content, and intelligent systems. From AI-driven manufacturing and digital health to advanced design and media production, these firms are accelerating digital transformation strengthening the region's reputation as a hub of creativity, innovation, and technical excellence.

Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering:

The East Midlands is a powerhouse of advanced manufacturing and engineering, anchored by global names across Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire. In Derbyshire, Rolls-Royce leads world-class programmes in aerospace and defence with a supply chain embedded in the region. Toyota UK at Burnaston drives innovation in hybrid automotive technologies while Leicestershire is home to MIRA Technology Park – a global hub for automotive research and disruptive technology, hosting companies such as Polestar, Bosch and Jaguar Land Rover.

Space & Digital Technologies:

Space Park Leicester positions the region as a national hub for satellite engineering, earth observation, and downstream applications, complemented by strong digital and AI innovation ecosystems in Nottingham and Leicester.

Life Sciences & Healthcare Innovation:

MedCity and BioCity in Nottingham join sites such as Charnwood Campus in Loughborough to create a nationally significant health and med-tech cluster, spanning research, product development, clinical trials and commercialisation. This ecosystem is further strengthened by the presence of digital technology and a network of leading medical and life sciences schools across the region, whose research excellence, specialist talent pipelines and close industry collaboration play a pivotal role in driving innovation and accelerating growth within the sector.

Energy & Clean Growth:

From the £2.5 billion STEP fusion project at the West Burton site to nuclear and hydrogen R&D at Infinity Park and Vaillant's £40m hot water cylinder plant in Derby, the East Midlands is shaping the future of clean energy production and decarbonisation.

Logistics & Connectivity:

East Midlands Airport is the UK's largest pure freight hub, underpinning national distribution networks and linking to freeport tax sites such as the East Midlands Intermodal Park (EMIP). Surrounding Grade-A logistics parks developed by SEGRO and Prologis connect the region through global carriers such as DHL, UPS and FedEx.

Supply Chain:

The East Midlands is powered by a diverse, world-class community of businesses forming a dynamic supply chain ready to drive UK economic growth. From manufacturing, digital, green energy, to food and drink, logistics and defence, these firms deliver innovation and resilience. Precision engineers and component specialists supply leading aerospace, automotive, and rail manufacturers, while software and data experts enable digital transformation. The region leads in sustainable transport and energy from hydrogen-ready propulsion and rail decarbonisation to sustainable aviation fuel and fusion energy and continues to grow its life sciences and space commercialisation sectors. The region blends heritage with innovation. Its central UK location and advanced logistics networks connect these strengths to global markets, positioning the East Midlands as one of the nation's most dynamic growth engines.

Drivers for Growth

East Midlands Freeport is the UK's only inland freeport spanning three tax sites, leveraging retained business rates to invest in infrastructure, skills and clean energy. Its investment strategy aims to mobilise more than £1bn across 2025–26 and beyond, supporting businesses and projects including the university-led Zero Carbon Innovation Centre.

Air Cargo & Logistics Corridor: East Midlands Airport's growing freight numbers and carrier expansion strengthen just-in-time manufacturing and e-commerce with links to East Midlands Gateway/EMIP intermodal sites.

Advanced Manufacturing: Aerospace, automotive, rail and food manufacturing remain export oriented and productivity rich; there are also opportunities in retrofit, circular economy and factory digitalisation.

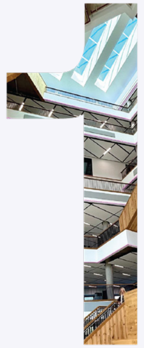
EMCCA: The new East Midlands Combined County Authority, covering Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Derby, and Nottingham, provides a strong voice for this part of the East Midlands, with powers over transport, skills, and net zero. It enables faster decision-making and better alignment of investment to regional priorities.

Research, Development and Skills Ecosystem: The East Midlands boasts a powerful network of universities and colleges forming the backbone of its innovation and skills ecosystem working closely with industry to drive growth. The University of Nottingham and Loughborough University lead world-class research in electrification, hydrogen, sport, health, and advanced manufacturing. Nottingham Trent University delivers expertise in applied sciences, design, and the creative industries, while the University of Derby focuses on applied research and technical skills. The University of Leicester contributes globally recognised strengths in space, health, and social sciences, and De Montfort University excels in computing, sustainability, creative technologies, business and law.

The region's further education colleges, including Derby College Group, West Nottinghamshire College, Leicester College, and Loughborough College Group play a crucial role in developing the technical and vocational skills that underpin industry-ready talent. Through close collaboration with employers, they deliver specialist training in advanced manufacturing, engineering, digital technologies, and green skills, ensuring a continuous flow of capability to meet regional and national growth ambitions. Together, this integrated education and research ecosystem ensures that innovation is matched by the skills, enterprise, and workforce needed to sustain long-term prosperity.

Key Actions to Deliver Economic Growth

With its strategic location and diverse industrial base, the East Midlands is well positioned to drive UK economic growth. To unlock this potential, businesses across the region are calling for targeted Government action to accelerate investment, enhance skills, strengthen infrastructure, and create the conditions for sustained innovation and growth.



Skills and Workforce Development

1.0 Create Flexible Skills Funds for SMEs and Microbusinesses

Action: Create Flexible Skills Funds allowing SMEs and microbusinesses to access accredited, short, modular training for their staff, including leadership, digital, and green transition skills.

Why:

- Existing training models are too rigid for small firms with limited staff capacity.
- Modular, bite-sized learning would let businesses train workers around production cycles.
- Helps microbusinesses invest in staff without losing productivity.

Impact: Boosts local business competitiveness, supports digital adoption and enhances productivity in the East Midlands' large microbusiness and SME base.

1.1 Align Skills Funding with Business and Workforce Planning Cycles

Action: Deliver multi-year, flexible skills funding settlements that align with business investment and workforce planning cycles allowing colleges, training providers, and employers in the East Midlands to plan skills delivery with confidence and respond to long-term economic needs.

Why?

- Current government skills and training budgets operate on short-term funding cycles, making it difficult for businesses and providers to plan sustained investment in people.
- Employers typically plan their workforce and capital investment over three to five-year period, while FE colleges and training providers need long-term certainty to recruit staff, invest in facilities, and build employer partnerships.

Impact: Predictable, long-term funding would enable education and industry to co-design future skills pipelines, build capacity in priority sectors, and deliver a stable, responsive workforce for regional growth.

1.2 Simplify Access to Government Training and Skills Schemes

Action: Establish a "Single Skills Portal" for business, consolidating access to government-funded training, apprenticeships, and business support in one easy-to-navigate platform.

Why:

- Many small firms lack HR capacity to navigate complex funding routes and fragmented programmes.
- A single portal, with localised support and navigation support would increase take-up of existing schemes.

Impact: Reduces administrative burden, increases training uptake and ensures public funding reaches the businesses that need it most.

Infrastructure and Connectivity

2.0 Accelerate Investment in Strategic Transport Corridors

Action: Commit to the upgrade and full delivery of key East Midlands transport routes including the A46, A50/A500 corridor, and Midland Main Line electrification to improve freight efficiency and regional connectivity.

Why?

- The East Midlands is a national logistics hub, yet congestion and outdated road links increase business costs and prevent growth
- Completing road and rail upgrades would cut journey times, enhance capacity, improve reliability, and unlock new industrial and housing sites.

Impact: Boosts productivity, strengthens supply chains, and enhances access to UK and international markets.

2.1 Guarantee Full-Fibre and 5G Coverage Across the Region

Action: Deliver digital connectivity for the East Midlands, ensuring universal access to gigabit broadband and 5G, with priority rollout for rural and industrial areas.

Why?

- Patchy connectivity restricts innovation, remote working, which restricts talent acquisition and digital adoption especially for business in rural communities.
- Public–private co-investment in digital infrastructure would enable small firms to access new markets and digital tools.

Impact: Drives digital inclusion, productivity, and innovation across all business sectors.

Planning System Reform

3.0 Enhance Planning Efficiency

Action: Deliver a streamlined and business-friendly planning system to accelerate growth in the East Midlands that enables quicker, more predictable decisions for commercial and housing developments through greater delegation to planning officers, digitalisation of planning processes, and enhanced resourcing for local planning authorities.

Why?

- The planning system applies a 19th century model to the 21st century and is one of the greatest barriers frequently cited as barriers to economic growth by members.
- The East Midlands faces significant planning delays that slow housing, industrial, and commercial development, undermining investor confidence and business growth.
- The government's proposals to delegate more routine planning decisions to officers and shorten consultation periods for major schemes are positive steps but they must be supported by regional implementation, digital tools, and capacity funding.
- Developers and businesses need a planning system that is responsive, consistent, and transparent, allowing them to plan investments and projects with greater certainty.

Impact: A faster, well-resourced, and digitally enabled planning system would cut delays, lower development risk, and accelerate the delivery of housing, industrial space, and infrastructure strengthening the East Midlands competitiveness and supporting sustainable economic growth.

Energy, Taxation and the Cost Base for Growth

4.0 Increase Energy Support Packages

Action: Provide targeted energy cost relief and efficiency grants for energy-intensive and manufacturing sectors in the East Midlands to remain globally competitive.

Why?

- The region has a strong manufacturing and logistics base exposed to volatile energy prices.
- Businesses need short-term stability and long-term incentives to invest in renewables and energy efficiency.

Impact: Reduces operating costs, encourages investment in sustainable

4.1 Deliver Business Rates System Reform to Reward Investment and Growth

Action: Progress at pace - the reform of the business rates system to incentivise investment and to reduce the burden on SMEs and high streets.

Why?

- Current business rates penalise investment and disproportionately impact small firms, traditional manufacturers, and bricks-and-mortar businesses.

Impact: Encourages reinvestment, supports town centre regeneration, and levels the playing field for regional businesses competing with online operators.

4.2 Expand Devolved Powers and Funding for Regional Growth

Action: Provide an integrated settlement to the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) allowing greater flexibility and long-term funding settlements to tailor business support, skills, and infrastructure investments to local needs.

Why?

- Local decision-makers understand the unique mix of urban, rural, and industrial economies in the region.
- Stable, multi-year funding enables strategic planning and delivery aligned with regional priorities.

Impact: Creates a more responsive and locally driven economic strategy, supporting productivity and competitiveness across all sectors.

4.3 A Long-Term Tax Roadmap to Drive Business Investment and Confidence

Action: A long-term business tax roadmap, setting out clear plans for corporation tax, capital allowances, and investment incentives over a multi-year period to give firms the stability and predictability needed to make confident investment decisions.

Why?

- Frequent and short-notice tax changes create uncertainty and discourage investment, particularly among SMEs that lack the financial flexibility to absorb policy shifts.
- Businesses plan investment cycles over several years, but the UK's current tax environment is shaped by year-to-year decisions, making it difficult to plan for expansion, innovation, or decarbonisation.
- A clear roadmap would give investors, developers, and manufacturers across the East Midlands the clarity and confidence to commit to long-term projects, from new facilities and machinery to research & development and green technologies.

Impact: A stable and transparent tax framework would provide businesses with the certainty to invest, innovate, and expand, boosting productivity, creating high-value jobs, and strengthening the East Midland' position as a competitive region for inward investment.

Green Growth in the East Midlands

Green growth is increasingly central to the East Midlands' competitiveness, resilience and international positioning. The latest Green Growth Trends 2025 study, produced by the University of Derby and East Midlands Chamber, shows progress despite persistent barriers that require policy support.

SMEs are leading in decarbonisation, while big firms scaled back. **Down 17.5% year-on-year**

46.2%

of regional businesses generate turnover from green products and services, **up by 3.3%** on 2024 and three times higher than the 2015 baseline.

Only 13.9%

of firms believe current policy enables green growth, **down 9.2% on 2024**, and confidence in how to access support continues to fall.

Just 9.1%

of firms collaborated on green growth in 2025; with almost a third reporting difficulty in identifying opportunities.

45.9%

of firms report no engagement with biodiversity or nature restoration projects, **up 15% on 2024.**

Targeted Green Growth Business Support:
Place-based, tailored for SMEs and large firms, reflecting 24 priority green skills areas.

Accelerated Decarbonisation Investment:
Long-term grants, tax incentives, R&D support and SME-corporate peer networks.

Nature-Based Solutions Uptake:
Funding streams, project visibility and SME-friendly participation pathways.

Closing the Skills Gap
Green and digital skills investment aligned with business needs; modular training pathways.

Incentivising Collaboration:
Platforms, funding and requirements that encourage regional collaboration on sustainability.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in the East Midlands

Building a stronger, fairer and more resilient economy requires workplaces that are inclusive, diverse and equitable. The Chamber's 2024 research with emh Group, based on responses from more than 300 businesses, shows encouraging momentum but also underlines persistent barriers that must be addressed if the East Midlands is to lead on workplace inclusion.

67%

of firms now report having a specific EDI policy, **up from 54% in 2023 and 48% in 2022.**

Creating inclusive environments and supporting diversity of thought are seen as primary benefits. **Half** highlight the role of EDI in recruitment and retention.

19%

say EDI forms a significant part of leadership discussions, **up from 15% in 2023.**

Fear of 'getting it wrong' (34%) is the biggest obstacle, alongside time pressures and lingering scepticism. **Fewer businesses think** EDI as 'not a priority' (33% compared to 42% in 2023).

24%

of businesses say EDI should play a significant role in future plans, but the average importance **rating fell to four out of 10** (down from five in 2023).

Champion Best Practice:
Showcase regional case studies to position EDI as both a fairness and competitiveness agenda.

Integrate EDI into Leadership and Skills:
Embed EDI within leadership training and provide resources for practical implementation.

Tailored Business Support:
Develop accessible SME programmes, with toolkits for recruitment and retention of diverse talent.

Collaboration and Networks:
Convene roundtables and peer-learning forums to share approaches and solutions.

Policy and Procurement Levers:
Embed EDI in public procurement and co-design regional EDI development programmes with employer bodies.

East Midlands Combined County Authority A Shared Vision

EMCCA has set out a ten-year Inclusive Growth Plan that puts inclusive, sustainable growth at the heart of our economy. The Chamber fully supports this blueprint, recognising its focus on raising productivity, creating good jobs and spreading prosperity across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Derby and Nottingham.

Growth Opportunity

Building on a £135–150 billion regional economy with global strengths in aerospace, rail, med-tech, life sciences, space, logistics, and a vibrant visitor and tourism sector.

Anchor assets include Rolls-Royce, Toyota, Boots, East Midlands Airport and the freeport.

Our universities and colleges are engines of innovation and skills, driving clean energy, digital and advanced manufacturing.

EMCCA Priorities backed by East Midlands Chamber

Jobs & Skills:
Delivering the "Opportunity Escalator," Youth Guarantee and devolved Adult Skills Fund to tackle long-term sickness and skills shortages.

Clean Energy & Net Zero:
Making the East Midlands the UK's next clean energy hub through hydrogen, fusion, retrofit and grid upgrades.

Connectivity:
East–West rail and road upgrades, certainty on Midland Main Line electrification, and integrated transport to unlock labour mobility.

Housing & Place:
Investment in affordable, sustainable homes aligned to regeneration priorities.

Innovation & Business Growth:
Scaling Growth Hub services, attracting private investment, and boosting SME adoption of digital/AI.

The Prize by 2035

Growing the economy by **£13bn**

Growing average household income by **£5,700**

Getting **10,860** homes built annually

Supporting **210,000** new skills qualifications

Getting **60,000** more people in work

East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) Growth Plan, 2025.

East Midlands Combined County Authority

Leicester / Leicestershire / Rutland
Why Devolution Matters

Economic Scale:
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland collectively form a regional economy with nationally significant strengths including advanced manufacturing, life sciences, space technology, and creative industries. Devolution would enable the region to capitalise on existing specialisms through locally driven investment and strategic coordination, ensuring that innovation, productivity, and exports continue to grow at scale.

Competitiveness:
Without a devolved settlement, the region risks falling behind comparable areas such as the neighbouring West Midlands Combined Authority and East Midlands Combined County Authority, which already benefit from devolved powers and funding. These areas have greater flexibility to make long-term investments in infrastructure, skills, and business support, advantages that directly influence inward investment and economic growth. Achieving devolution would place Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland on an equal footing, enabling them to compete more effectively for talent, business, and funding.

Integrated Funding Settlements:
Devolution brings access to single, multi-year integrated funding settlements, removing the need to navigate fragmented and restrictive departmental funding streams. This allows for greater local strategic decision-making, ensuring that resources are allocated according to local priorities rather than central government criteria. As a result, funding can be used more efficiently to deliver projects that have a tangible and timely impact on local communities and businesses.

Skills and Talent:
A devolved system allows local leaders to better align universities, colleges, and employers with the needs of the local economy. By tailoring skills programmes and employment initiatives to regional priorities, devolution supports a sustainable talent pipeline and enhances productivity. This alignment is essential to addressing skills shortages, supporting innovation, and retaining graduates within the local labour market.

Infrastructure:
Devolution provides the tools and authority to plan and invest in transport, digital connectivity, and energy resilience the foundational infrastructure needed for future growth. Local decision-making ensures that infrastructure projects are coherent, responsive, and coordinated with spatial and economic priorities, improving connectivity and reducing barriers to investment.

Business Voice:
A successful devolution model must ensure that businesses are integral to decision-making structures. Engaging business leaders in governance helps ensure that policies and investments are practical, growth-focused, and aligned with the real-world needs of employers. Embedding the business voice will strengthen accountability, foster innovation, and support a pro-enterprise environment that drives inclusive economic growth.

Strategic Pathway to Devolution for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

1 Build a Shared Vision and Evidence Base

Develop a clear, unified vision for economic growth supported by robust data on regional strengths, while aligning local ambitions with national priorities.

2 Strengthen Collaboration and Governance

Establish a clear and accountable governance framework that enables effective engagement with regional stakeholders, including local authorities, business leaders, and education partners.

This approach will build shared ownership, strengthen decision-making, and ensure that strategic choices reflect the collective priorities and long-term interests of the region.

3 Engage Government Early

Develop a concise devolution prospectus setting out governance, priorities, and the economic case. Open structured discussions with DLUHC, HM Treasury and Ministers to explore deal options and timelines, supported by cross-party local consensus.

4 Build Public and Business Support

Communicate the benefits of devolution clearly and consistently to residents, employers, and community partners. Use existing regional networks and business forums to gather feedback, demonstrate progress, and maintain visible momentum ensuring that stakeholders understand and support the region's long-term ambitions.

5 Develop a Local Investment Framework

Create a single Economic Local Growth Plan to coordinate how devolved funding is allocated and managed across the region. This plan should set clear priorities, align investments with local economic objectives, and provide a transparent basis for decision-making.

6 Focus on Priority Powers

Concentrate on areas where local control will have the greatest impact:

- Skills: Align education and training with employer demand.
- Transport & Infrastructure: Integrate planning and investment locally.
- Business & Innovation: Streamline business support and attract investment.
- Housing: Enable locally led development and regeneration.
- Net Zero: Drive local energy and decarbonisation initiatives.

About this Framework

This Framework for Growth has been developed drawing on the insights, experience, and expertise of East Midlands Chamber members.

It reflects extensive engagement across the region through member forums, Quarterly Economic Survey results, Chamber policy conferences, the East Midlands Manufacturing Network, and numerous one-to-one meetings with businesses.

Contributions from the East Midlands Chamber Board and Bank of England forums have also helped shape its priorities, ensuring that its priorities are grounded in real business experience and aligned with the ambitions of the region's employers and entrepreneurs.

The East Midland Chamber always welcomes the involvement of new businesses and partners to help strengthen the voice of the East Midlands and drive future growth together.