

Produced by: Estelle Worthington, CN4M Policy and Research Officer

Manchester City-Region pilot & proposal for a Combined Authority for Greater Manchester: An Overview

Please note: a full policy briefing is available from Community Network for Manchester which explains these initiatives in detail and provides some analysis of the opportunities and challenges they present from the perspective of the VCS. This document is intended to provide an overview only.

Manchester City-Region

The Greater Manchester Region was chosen by the Government in April 2009 as a pilot Statutory City-Region. New devolved powers for the area were then formalised in the Greater Manchester City-Region agreement, which was signed in December 2009 by the leaders of the Association for Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) and the Regional Minister.

The process of becoming a statutory city-region involves central Government giving groups of local authorities additional freedoms and flexibilities with the aim of helping them better drive economic growth and contribute to sustainable development.

The Manchester City-Region agreement centres on reforming public services so that they are better able to support long-term economic growth and improve citizens' life chances. The Manchester City-Region agreement includes a commitment to pilot a number of projects relating to children's services, skills, young people, housing, science and research. It was also agreed that the pilot would explore how Greater Manchester could assume increased responsibility over transport.

The city-region pilot is being delivered through ten workstreams. Four of the workstreams are being delivered within specific geographical boundaries and cover the following themes: early years, better life chances in the most deprived areas, housing and low carbon economy. In Manchester, the early years pilot and the better life chances in the most deprived areas pilot are both being delivered in Ardwick, while the low carbon communities pilot is being delivered in Moss Side.

Proposal to establish a combined authority for Greater Manchester

The proposal to establish a combined authority for Greater Manchester builds directly on the Greater Manchester City-Region pilot. According to the consultation document which lays out the proposal (for more on this, see below), the Government believes it is important that the governance arrangements in Greater Manchester are adequate for the city-region to deliver on the commitments laid out in the city-region agreement. This is based on the evidence of two separate reviews, which together suggest that the "current sub-regional governance arrangements across Greater Manchester are sub-optimal for improving the economic performance of the city-region."

On 29 March 2010, AGMA published a scheme for the establishment of a new Greater Manchester combined authority. Under the scheme the new combined authority would take over responsibility for co-ordinating economic development, regeneration and transport provision across Greater Manchester. The combined authority would also oversee the performance of the new devolved powers contained in the Manchester City-Region agreement.

The scheme proposes that all the functions of the Greater Manchester Integrated Transport Authority (GMITA) would be transferred to the combined authority, with the transport authority being dissolved. Under the new arrangements, a Joint Committee would be established to assume responsibility for delivering transport across the Manchester City-Region.

The scheme was submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government, who worked closely with a number of other departments, most notably the Department for Transport, to consider the case for a combined authority. The Government concluded that AGMA have made a compelling case for the establishment of a combined authority, which has led to the proposal being released for broader consultation before being approved by the Secretary for State.

The consultation period will run from 31 March – 14 July 2010. However, as all the AGMA local authorities have now signed up to the scheme, and it is backed by central government, the extent to which these plans may be influenced as a result of consultation feedback may be limited. According to an AGMA news release, AGMA have requested that the new authority should be created as from 1 April, 2011. If these plans go ahead, this would be the country's first ever combined authority.

For full details, see Department of Communities and Local Government consultation: 'Proposal to establish a combined authority for Greater Manchester':
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1526224.pdf>