

Devolution Priority Programme consultations
Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

UK100 Submission

Introduction

This submission is from UK100 which is a network of 117 local authorities and their leaders who have pledged to lead a rapid transition to net zero in their communities ahead of the Government's legal target.

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?

Local authorities could gain more decision-making powers to tailor policies for regional needs, including net zero. Funding reforms and integrated settlements would enable long-term planning and service integration across sectors, ensuring regional priorities are better represented. This could enhance coordination across councils in sectors like transport, energy, housing.

However these are not guaranteed -

- Climate expertise in local councils, especially district councils, may be lost if not integrated into new structures.
- The government's timeline for devolution is unclear, potentially delaying benefits for all regions.
- Disparities in climate action could widen between regions with varying capacities, affecting net zero progress.
- New responsibilities, like SDS, Local Power Plans, will require significant local capacity-building.
- Local delivery capacity should be supported, with investment in skills, officer capacity, and collaboration to ensure effective implementation.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined Authority?

The MCA's formal governance structure allows for strategic oversight across key areas such as transport, housing, etc enabling region-wide solutions. Simplified decision-making processes, like majority voting, could streamline governance. But without clear mechanisms for inclusive decision-making and shared accountability, power may get concentrated, creating a disconnect between regional priorities and local needs.

Many interconnected reforms are still pending, and success relies on their timely and effective implementation. Accelerating integrated settlements is crucial to enabling local areas to benefit sooner.

Recommendations:

- Establish formal partnership structures between the MCA and local authorities for shared decision-making.
- There is a need for a level playing field to avoid disparities between regions, as some may progress faster than others, resulting in inequality, particularly in local climate action.
- Set clear expectations for collaboration with local leaders.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority will support the economy of the area?

The new MCA model offers strategic economic coordination across local authorities, enabling unified approaches to regional challenges and opportunities. It could attract inward investment, foster job creation, and tailor policies to local needs, enhancing economic development.

The risk of uneven economic benefits across areas, neglecting smaller businesses, and local councils' limited capacity to contribute effectively could hinder the MCA's potential.

Recommendations-

- Strengthen local economic capacity by investing in development teams and fostering partnerships, especially in smaller councils.
- Establish robust monitoring systems to track economic growth and ensure benefits reach all areas.
- The White Paper lacks strategies to equip councils with tools for revenue-raising and clear fiscal devolution. This would boost local economic growth.
- This could centralise procurement processes which might limit flexibility to meet specific local needs and reduce opportunities for SMEs

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?

The MCA model offers the opportunity to align key social strategies like housing, skills, transport, and health, leading to more coordinated and effective interventions that address social challenges and reduce inequalities.

However, regional strategies may overlook specific local needs, especially in rural areas. Additionally, balancing economic growth with social wellbeing could be difficult, risking the marginalisation of social objectives.

Recommendations-

- Include reducing inequality and improving social wellbeing as core goals of the MCA strategy.
- Develop strategies tailored to rural areas, addressing their unique challenges in access to services, net zero, transport, and jobs.

- Opportunity to embed climate action within social objectives, unlocking co-benefits like improved public health, better air quality, and more green job opportunities.
- Integrate climate action into social policies to unlock co-benefits like improved health, green job creation, and climate resilience.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined Authority will improve local government services in the area?

The MCA can enhance local government services through better coordination, efficient resource use, and long-term strategic planning, improving service delivery and addressing complex issues like climate change.

Transitioning to new governance may lead to instability, with councils facing challenges with new structures, risking rural and smaller areas being left behind. Without investment in workforce development, local authorities may struggle to engage effectively with the MCA and deliver services.

Recommendations:

- Local authorities require sufficient resources and support, to engage effectively with the MCA in strategic planning and delivery.
- Local authorities are closest to communities, with valuable expertise and skilled personnel. Retaining and strengthening this capacity is essential to ensure the system functions effectively and maintains the vital role of local authorities.
- Establish a formal mechanism for local authorities and communities to co-shape priorities.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?

The MCA can provide strategic, cross-boundary leadership on nature recovery, enabling large-scale environmental interventions and addressing fragmented policies. It can attract investment in green infrastructure, driving the transition to a green economy.

However, without statutory responsibilities, dedicated funding, and integration across all portfolios, there is a risk that these priorities will be treated as secondary to economic growth. Policies like the target of building 1.5 million homes should not further compromise nature.

Recommendations:

- Introduce a statutory duty for climate action and net zero with necessary resources and funding across all local authorities.
- Provide financial and technical support, including expertise in environmental assessments and urban planning.
- Embed climate adaptation and nature recovery across all strategic portfolio

- Equip local authorities to monitor and evaluate nature and biodiversity indicators, including reliable data systems.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?

Devolution through the MCA provides an opportunity to shift decision-making closer to local communities giving an important opportunity to shift decision-making closer to local communities so regional strategies are informed by local needs. However, the MCA must respect diverse local identities and geographies.

For the MCA to reflect these identities, it must prioritise inclusive public participation. Local authorities, with their deep knowledge of communities, are best placed to lead engagement. However, they need resources & support from national government to deliver meaningful public engagement and foster local ownership of decisions.

The UK100 toolkit on public engagement offers valuable resources to help local authorities establish participatory structures, such as citizens' assemblies and community budgets. These structures will allow local people to play an active role in shaping decisions, ensuring economic and environmental strategies reflect local aspirations and identities.