

North East devolution – Frequently asked questions

What is devolution?

Devolution is about taking decisions as near as possible to where they will have an impact. As an example, it makes most sense for the Government in London to take decisions about defence but your local council will decide when your bins will be emptied. At the moment, a large proportion of decisions about what happens in the North East is taken by the Government and its departments. Through a process known as 'devolution deals' the Government is giving areas more powers to make their own decisions on issues such as transport, skills and support for business.

What is a devolution deal?

A devolution deal is a way groups of councils agree with Government to take greater control over funding for their area and take more major decisions, currently taken in London, locally.

Who has agreed it?

The leaders of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland councils have agreed in principle to a devolution deal which the Government has confirmed it is 'minded to' approve. The deal will now be the subject of a public consultation and will be formally considered by each council before the legal measures necessary to put the deal into practice are taken.

What does this mean for people who live and work here?

This is a deal that guarantees long term funding that will allow us to invest in public transport, support business, improve skills and living standards while tackling the climate emergency. It will mean more of the decisions with major impacts on our region which are currently taken in London will be taken here. And it means being at the front of the queue for future powers and funding.

It is expected that the initial outcomes from the deal will include:

- Creation of an additional 24,000 jobs;
- Building an additional 3,100 homes;
- Helping 6,000 people to get "work ready" each year;
- Commissioning 70,000 courses each year to get people good jobs;
- Taking major steps towards achieving Net Zero; and
- Leveraging £5.0bn of private sector investment.

How will it work?

The seven local authorities already work closely with each other, with two combined authorities currently existing in the area, namely the North East Combined Authority (NECA) and North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA). This devolution deal represents the next step forward in that partnership working. The biggest change will be the creation of a directly-elected Mayor for the entire region, who will take decisions with the local authorities within the new combined authority for the North East.

What area will it cover?

The deal covers the North East local authority areas of County Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

How much is the deal worth?

The devolution deal for the North East will include more than £4.2bn of additional investment over 30 years.

Why do we need a Mayor?

The mayor will be a metro mayor, which simply means they are a directly-elected leader of a region spanning a number of local authority areas.

Metro mayors are distinct from 'local authority mayors', such as the Mayor of North Tyneside Council, who are directly-elected leaders of individual councils.

Metro mayors work with combined authorities to exercise powers at a regional level.

The Government believes the public should be able to directly elect a mayor to ensure accountability for the additional powers and funding made available through devolution deals.

What powers will the Mayor have?

The Mayor will have transport powers including the ability to draw up a local transport plan. Unlike some devolution deals, the Mayor's power will not extend to the remit of the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), with Northumbria and Durham police force areas continuing to have their own separate PCC.

How would the Mayor be held to account?

The Mayor would be part of a Combined Authority with North East council leaders who would all have a say in the decisions taken at a regional level. There would also be an Overview and Scrutiny process similar to that in place in local authorities. The Mayor would be responsible to voters and re-elected every four years.

Who will choose the Mayor?

The Mayor will be elected by the electorate of the seven constituent local authorities.

When will the Mayor be elected?

The first mayoral election is expected to take place in May 2024 and they will serve a four year term.

Will this cost more?

As part of the devolution deal, funding has been secured to meet the additional costs of the new arrangements. The Mayor will have limited tax-raising powers and will be accountable to the electorate for that decision and how that money is spent.

Will this mean more politicians?

The new arrangements are an expansion of the powers held and area covered by the North of Tyne Combined Authority's elected mayor. This role will cease to exist and a new directly elected mayor will be elected to represent the entire region, meaning no increase in the number of political positions held in the region.

Isn't this just more bureaucracy?

Devolution is about reducing bureaucracy. By taking decisions closer to where they will have an impact we can reduce the lengthy processes involved with dealing with Government and secure better outcomes offering better value for money.

What does this mean for existing councils?

Councils will continue to have the responsibilities they do now, providing vital services to their communities and championing their towns, rural communities and cities. This is about moving powers and money from Whitehall to the North East for the benefit of all our communities.

What does this mean for the role of Police and Crime commissioner?

The seven partner local authorities fall into two police force areas, served by Northumbria Police and Durham Police.

These positions will remain and the responsibilities not transferred to the new North East mayor.

What is the alternative to agreeing this deal?

The devolution deal offers the region significant and secure additional funding to invest in better public transport, improving skills, supporting business, attracting jobs and tackling the climate emergency. It also provides much greater freedom to take important decisions that impact on our communities. The alternative to the deal is to continue with existing governance arrangements, including the Joint Transport Committee, North of Tyne MCA and North East Combined Authority; this would mean less funding and fewer powers for the region.”

What happens after the consultation?

A summary of consultation responses will be compiled and share with Government, who will then decide whether or not to go ahead with establishing a Mayoral Combined Authority covering the seven local authority areas.

Why isn't there a public referendum on whether we should have a devolution deal?

This was a Government decision. There is no provision in the statutory process for a referendum - it is a Government process we are following, which is replicating the process seen previously in the North East for the North of Tyne Combined Authority and in other parts of the country.

There will be a full public consultation as part of the process and consultation responses will be considered by partners regionally as well as Government.