

Devolution...a beginner's guide

You've probably heard a lot of noise around devolution in the media, not least because Greater Manchester is in the forefront of moves to give English cities more influence over their own destinies. But you'd be forgiven for being confused about what it all means...and what, if anything, it means for you and your friends and family. Here we present a quick beginner's guide:

What is devolution?

England is one of the most centralised countries in the world – with many decisions affecting cities such as Manchester being taken in London by politicians in Westminster and civil servants in Whitehall. Most of the money raised through tax in this area goes to the government, which then decides how much each area gets back, often with 'strings attached' which specify what it has to be spent on. This means that instead of decisions being tailored to fit the needs and priorities of individual areas and their people, 'one size fits all' policies can be handed down. It's like making a single size of suit and then it expecting it to fit everyone.

Devolution is about moving powers and influence from Westminster and Whitehall to local areas, closer to the people. Working together, Oldham and the other councils in the region can use increased freedoms and flexibilities over how we spend funding to set policies and priorities which reflect the needs of people here. That will mean better results. It's like being measured up for a tailor-made suit rather than being handed a sloppily-fitting one off the peg. And it's an opportunity that Greater Manchester is grasping.

Why do we need it?

Devolution is not something which Greater Manchester is seeking for the sake of it. It's a means to an end, not an end in itself. The point of devolution is that it gives the region greater control over its own destiny so we can achieve better results: Creating the conditions for a strong, prosperous region and supporting residents to have the skills, confidence and crucially health to share in that success.

Evidence from around the world, for example Germany, has shown that where cities have more control over their own affairs they are more successful.

Greater Manchester has a strong collective vision for where it wants to be by 2020. Devolution is a vehicle which will help us get there.

What's happened so far?

Greater Manchester has blazed a trail for devolution which other cities want to follow. A major step in this journey came last November when an historic devolution deal with the government saw the region gain new powers in transport, policing, planning, housing and skills. An interim mayor was appointed to provide extra leadership and pave the way for an elected mayor from 2017.

Building on this platform earlier this year, the 10 councils signed a pioneering agreement with NHS partners to bring health and social care together. Work has started already and from next year the entire health and social care budget for the region, currently around £6bn, will be controlled by Greater Manchester.

Stepping up prevention work so that fewer people have to go to hospital will reduce the pressure on beds and A&E services – saving lives and money. The latest agreement, bringing together public health services, will add to this. Improving social care, linking it with health care, will mean that fewer people have to stay in hospital or travel there and can receive care closer to home.

The most recent budget gave the region extra powers in planning and skills. It also meant that from 2017 the work of Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service will also be overseen by the GM elected mayor, enabling emergency services and councils to work even better together. We will also look at how other services can be better integrated.

Why should I care?

This might sound remote and bureaucratic but over time it should spell real improvements for Greater Manchester people.

Let's take some examples which give a flavour.

Perhaps the biggest single prize is **health**. Greater Manchester currently has some of the worst health statistics in the country, with far too many people suffering from poor health. Improved prevention work and more joined-up care has the potential to dramatically improve this picture.

Working together has already enabled the Council and other Greater Manchester local authorities to deliver **transport** improvements such as the ongoing Metrolink expansion. But new powers, for instance over bus franchising, will ensure a better overall service and open the door to Oyster card-style smart ticketing.

Before devolution, Greater Manchester had little influence over the **skills** training being delivered in the area. That meant there was often a mismatch between the skills people needed for the jobs available and the skills which they had. But the region has been given greater influence over shaping skills provision which will help ensure people have the right skills in the future – helping people and businesses alike.

What happens next?

First and foremost, we need to get on with delivering the improvements we need, using the devolution we've already secured.

We will also continue to make the case to government for further devolution to Greater Manchester wherever this will strengthen the city and region. In particular, we believe that more of the money generated in this area should be reinvested here.

The interim mayor is working alongside Greater Manchester's ten council leaders and other public sector organisations to ensure the benefits of devolution are delivered.

In 2017, subject to legislation, an elected will be chosen in Greater Manchester-wide elections.