

Devolution and the Combined Authorities in Yorkshire

James Stevens
Director for Cities

Devolution – inception of idea

- Pioneered by Labour (John Prescott): North East Devolution Referendum 2004 – but decisively rejected (78% against).
- Pursued by Coalition: *No Stone Unturned: In pursuit of growth* (2012) – Heseltine report recommending merging of funding streams and for these placed under local control for efficiency and flexibility to maximise impact.
- Fresh impetus from the 2014 Scottish independence referendum – Westminster outsources authority through more English devolution. David Cameron “need to empower our great cities”.
- George Osborne, Coalition and Tory administration Chancellor – advocate of the “Northern Powerhouse”. Creation of Combined Authorities is central to that vision.

What is a Combined Authority?

Local Government Association:

*“A combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries. It is far more robust than an informal partnership or even a joint committee. The creation of a CA means that member councils can be more ambitious in their joint working and can take advantage of powers and resources devolved to them from national government. **While established by Parliament, CAs are locally owned and have to be initiated and supported by the councils involved.**”*

Last sentence is key: unanimity of views is essential to make progress

How many Combined Authorities are there?

Nine combined authorities have been established so far (of which seven have secured devolution deals, and six have directly elected mayors in place). They are:

- [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough](#) ([@CambsPboroCA](#))
- [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#) ([@Greatermcr](#))
- [Liverpool City Region](#) ([@LivCityRegion](#))
- [Sheffield City Region](#) (will hold elections in 2018) ([@SheffCityRegion](#))
- [Tees Valley Combined Authority](#) ([@TeesValleyCA](#))
- [West Midlands Combined Authority](#) ([@WestMids_CA](#))
- [West of England](#) ([@WestofEnglandCA](#))
- No directly elected mayor
- [North East Combined Authority](#) ([@NorthEastCA](#))
- [West Yorkshire Combined Authority](#) ([@WestYorkshireCA](#))

What powers do they have in relation to housing?

All Devolution Agreements have the following features in common:

- Some form of Spatial Plan making, sometimes on a statutory footing (e.g. GM, Liverpool, Cambs and the West of England).
- Some will have CPO powers
- Some have planning call-in powers
- Ability to establish Mayoral Development Corps (with authorisation of government)
- ‘Single pot’ approaches to funding – devolution and concentration of central government funding streams for more targeted spending on local housing priorities

What Combined Authorities are there in Yorkshire?

Sheffield City Region

Consisting Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster

Devolution agreement signed with Whitehall but no directly elected Mayor yet. This election is scheduled for May 2018

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Established 2014. Consists Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds, Wakefield and York councils and the Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

No devolution agreement signed yet. No prospect of a Mayoral election until they have.

Sheffield City Region

AIMS

- Need to provide on average between 7,000 and 10,000 new homes each year (target of 70,000 new homes by 2024) (Strategic Economic Plan)
- Working with Government to better use public sector land, planning powers and funding in order to accelerate housing delivery
- Sheffield City Region Housing Fund – £8m to support schemes that can deliver quickly – plugs gap in other national investment schemes

PROGRESS

Still failing to reach a consensus on what powers the Metro Mayor should have - may be very limited = Mayor likely to be ineffectual

Centre for Cities opinion poll: housing is the second biggest priority for the new Metro Mayor

West Yorkshire Combined Authority

AIMS

- *“The LEP and Combined Authority have a joint vision for economic growth in Leeds City Region, which covers the districts of Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Craven, Harrogate, Kirklees, Leeds, Selby, Wakefield and York.” (NOTE DUPLICATION WITH SHEFFIELD)*
- *We aim to raise the quality of life in our region by creating the right environment for our businesses to grow. We want to guarantee every young person a job or a training opportunity through the creation of 62,000 good quality jobs in the region. We also want to ensure our residents have the right skills and opportunities to access those jobs. As part of this vision, the officer body’s mission is to be the driving force for delivering an outstanding economy with better connectivity and services for businesses, people and places, on behalf of CA.*
- **Develop and regenerate integrated spatial priority areas, supporting employment, quality environments and the building of 10,000-13,000 new homes per year”**

Why we should be interested

Combined Authorities insert an additional tier of political control between national government and local authorities;

Potential to manage cross boundary issues; but...

The inability to agree on contentious housing issues (numbers, allocations, Green Belt reviews) could mean that city region plans will probably lack ambition despite the high sounding rhetoric;

Consequently a tendency to de-prioritise higher spatial plan making. This results in delay to the publication of local plans essential for delivery;

Hence reinforces tendency towards short-termism – prioritising tangible results in the next three years rather than what is needed to sustain delivery in the longer term

Risk: lowest common denominator planning / vague aspirations / detail avoided

What the industry might ask for

- Further devolution of funding and legal powers should be conditional upon concrete progress with Spatial Plans and local plan production

E.g. Sheffield Devolution Agreement says that agreement of the spatial framework “*must not delay any Local Development Plans*”

- These Strategic Frameworks must make the necessary strategic land use decisions to meet the government’s new housing targets in full.