

Devolution Overview. Teams Meeting. 17.9. 25

Alison Hatcher (AH, WAFC Officer): Discussed previous work to get to this stage of preparation for devolution. Up and coming dates: 29.9.25: Cabinet meeting decision, 9.10. 25: full council vote, 14.10.25: Cabinet meeting: final decision.

Early 2026: Creation of Cumbria Combined Authority (CCA). Then transitional work and arrangements before mayoral election in May 2027.

The English Devolution Bill will rename the CCA: "The Cumbria Mayoral Strategic Authority" (CMSA).

Minimum starter functions of CCA (prior to appointment of mayor): transport powers, power to pay grants, police and fire authority will transfer into the CMSA (after mayoral appointment).

CMSA Powers:

(a) Transport: local transport plan, bus routes, influence bus franchise and rail.

(b) Housing: Produce Spatial Development Strategy. Coordinate Affordable Housing. Work with Homes England.

(c) Skills and Jobs: Commission Adult Skills Programme. Encourage economic development and increase business growth.

(d) Climate and Nature Recovery: Net Zero planning, sustainable energy and Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

(e) Public Safety: Police and Fire, Safer Cumbria Partnership.

(f) Health: Tackling health inequalities, work with NHS and Integrated Care Boards.

More powers and responsibilities will be devolved in the future. There is a new Council of Nations and Regions. Only mayoral authorities will have a seat on this council.

What will the MSA not do: It is a small organisation focusing on strategic issues. Most functions will stay with WAFC: bin collections, street clearing, schools, planning, public health, parks and leisure services.

Funding and Investment: Circa £11 million per annum, split 50/50 between capital and revenue.

Capital funding will be £1 million per annum for 4 years to support the establishment of the MSA (Mayoral Strategic Authority).

Central funding: £8 million for adult skills fund and transport and housing regeneration. The MSA could have a precept (added cost to the council tax). There would also be additional funding from national bodies. Areas are more likely to get these funds if they have strategic authorities.

Questions:

M Eyles (ME, LD): Will the MSA precept replace the Police and Crime one?

AH: Yes.

ME: Will there be an additional one for the mayor ?

AH: Yes, if they decide this. Other MSAs have had £60-80 million of extra funding. Possibly the CMSA will receive between £26 million and £30 million extra funding per year.

Linda Jones (LJ, Chief Legal Officer, WAFC): Discussed governance. There will be two voting members (councillors) from each council. After the mayor is elected, he/she will have one vote as well. Also there can be up to 4 non-constituent members, representatives from other bodies.

They don't have voting rights. Scrutiny and Audit will hold the mayor to account.

Shirley Evans (SE, LD): Is the only extra funding so far, £11 million.

AH: There is £1 million per year for set-up costs. There will be other sources of funding. The City Transport Fund will not be available to us but there will be other sources of transport funding.

Bill McEwan (BMcE, L): Asked about the independence of the police.

AH: The PCC (Police and Crime Commission) will move across to the CMSA. Currently local authorities have to bid for funding, it is competitive with narrow windows before closing dates.

CMSA will be a member of the new Council of Regions and will have a greater chance of getting

funding.

Matt Brereton (MB, C): Asked about strategic projects.

AH: Strategic projects used to be done under the LEP (Local Enterprise Partnership).

MB: A good example for us to look at would be Tees Valley (Tees Valley Combined Authority formed 2016. Chair Ben Houchen (Mayor). April 25, told by government to improve following concerns about governance and value for money. According to reports, £124 million went to local business men and the taxpayer has paid out about £500 million.)

Opportunities

Tom Andrew (TA, working for WAFC): Went over the advantages. In addition to what was said previously, there will be new powers such the ability to start a tourist tax. There would be faster delivery of improvements. Also there would be the chance to improve the current NHS misalignments (2 Integrated Care Boards in WAFC).

The government wants to get the Great North up and running, this will let Cumbria have a powerful voice. The intentions are to award more powers to MCAs in the future.

Risks

Political imbalance: One council and the mayor may outvote the other council.

Financial liability: Section 73 (finance) officer must ensure a balanced budget.

Organisational strain: Increased pressure on officers and councillors. The £1 million funding per annum will help allay this by employing extra officer support.

There will be transfer of some strategy, eg transport, skills education, Net Zero but this could reduce direct control of the current councils. But the council will retain all existing local service responsibility.

John Bardell (JB, Adviser): If WAFC agrees to devolve, early 2026 the MSA will be legally established. A non-mayoral year will follow with decisions made by consensus. In May 2027 there will be an election for mayor. There will be governance with sub-groups, scrutiny and also external advisory input.

Adrian Waite (AW, LD): Asked about the 30 year funding deal, this is a long time and governments will change over that time period.

TA: Governments usually honour previous funding commitments.

AH: This is the most significant change to local government that has happened in the last 50 years.