

# Winchester City Council: Response to Hampshire and the Solent devolution consultation

## Question 1:

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

### **Agree**

We welcome the new Devolution framework - the resulting move of power out of Westminster and into the hands of local decision makers - and the opportunity that this gives us to deliver more effectively for our area.

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## Question 2:

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

### **Disagree**

We disagree with the proposed governance arrangements – which lead to dramatic underrepresentation of the county parts of the mayoral combined authority area – especially district functions in those areas – and risk failing to adequately represent the diversity of interests and views across the MCCA area. We are also concerned that the electoral system for the Mayor may risk political paralysis and weaker delivery.

In Manchester, each MCA member (excluding the Mayor) represents, on average, 295,000 people. In the Solent part of the Hampshire/Solent MCCA, each MCCA member will represent on average 202,000 people. In mainland Hampshire, the proposed two MCCA members will represent, on average, 714,000 people. This means that citizens in the county area carry 72% less weight and not all residents across the MCCA will have equal representation.

**To achieve democratic equality, the County area would need 7 representatives (who would, we understand, be allocated in line with political proportionality) but even an increase to 3 representatives (which ensures that no one MCCA member could outvote the rest of the membership) would help address this gross imbalance.**

We also believe it is necessary to increase the number of non-constituent places on the authority.

While recognising that the decision not to have an Assembly (as in London) is implicit in the choice of the Mayoral County Combined Authority model, and recognising that districts cannot be constituent councils in a Mayoral County Combined Authority under the terms of the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, we believe that it is a major issue that district functions are under-represented – particularly as they relate to planning and housing delivery. As proposed, all MCCA constituent members combined deliver a small proportion (14%) of the area's housing delivery – and most housing delivery is managed by authorities that will not be constituent members of the MCCA. For perspective, our own district – Winchester City Council – is currently delivering more houses than the three unitaries of Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight added together.

There is strong experience in the south of Hampshire (through the Partnership for South Hampshire) in collaboration between districts, unitaries and the county council to address the housing and planning agenda and believe this should be reflected in the new combined authority. This can be addressed by some or all districts becoming non-constituent members of the authority and a subsequent decision to give them voting rights.

However, attempting to achieve proportionate representation of the 11 districts across the different geographies of Hampshire, alongside achieving representation of the other major interest groups within the MCCA area – such as the Freeport, two National Parks, two NHS ICBs – for example – is not possible to achieve with only 5 non-constituent/associate places – and so we believe this number will need to be increased significantly to make this possible.

**To enable all districts to participate in the MCCA – even as non-voting members – would require an increase from 5 to 11 non-constituent members. To include other interest groups would require more.**

**Finally, we are concerned that the use of First Past the Post risks the election of a Mayor who does not have the consent of the majority of Hampshire's electorate** – indeed only has the support of a small minority – with the inevitable barriers that will pose to their ability to deliver. There are many electoral systems that can address this – including the alternative vote, supplementary voting or two stage voting – which we believe should be considered in the upcoming Devolution Bill.

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### **Question 3:**

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

#### ***Strongly Agree***

The Council believes that there are huge opportunities for Hampshire and the Solent with new Mayoral Combined County Authority – provided adequate funding is made available – with better integration of transport – especially public transport – between neighbouring transport authorities, better integrated skills development and collaboration with our excellent universities – and, from our own authority's perspective – opportunities to accelerate regeneration, job creation and business growth and our delivery of affordable housing.

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

#### ***Disagree***

While economic growth and improved skills have the potential to improve social mobility and regeneration funding and improved infrastructure can help areas of deprivation, the poor financial outlook for Upper Tier Local Authorities with the dramatically increasing deficit faced across the entire area will hold back the ability for the combined authority to have the impact on social outcomes needed across the Hampshire/Solent area.

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

#### ***Disagree***

The likely scale of funding available via the MCCA will be unable to address the large and growing combined deficit faced by Upper Tier Local Authorities in the Hampshire and Solent area. For perspective, Hampshire's deficit on adult and children's services alone is on track to exceed all the spending on services and administration by all the district councils combined within the next couple of years. This gap is of a scale that will be impossible to address through Local Government Reorganisation alone and cannot be addressed through the planned support for the Combined Authority.

Irrespective of the benefits of the MCCA, without urgent intervention, the public's perception (and the financial reality) will be of dramatically worsening local authority services following the establishment of the new authority.

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

***Neither agree nor disagree***

The City Council welcomes the MCCA's role in the Warm Homes Plan and Local Power Plan and leadership role in Local Nature Recovery Strategies, but believe there would be **significant advantages to putting in place an additional statutory duty for a climate strategy across the Combined Authority area**. While the specific initiatives outlined in the 'environment and climate change' paragraph of the consultation are very welcome - our experience is that there will be faster progress with a more explicit overall strategy for the combined authority area.

Given the critical importance of Spatial Development Strategy in the MCCA's work, we are also **concerned at the relatively low profile for MCCAs in the Environmental Delivery Plan process being established alongside the Nature Restoration Fund in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill**. A coordinated approach to nutrient neutrality by local authorities in Hampshire and the Solent area is already paying dividends – and LPAs are already managing the delivery and assessment of nutrient reduction – and some authorities, such as our own – are delivering it directly. Finding a way to enable a stronger leadership role for Local Government – via the MCCA – in nature restoration via the Planning and Infrastructure Bill or in the planned Devolution Bill would be a useful strengthening of the CA role. This is an area where we believe local government will be able to deliver at greater pace and scale than a local arm of national government.

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

***Disagree***

Hampshire and the Solent is a large and diverse area – including the M3 corridor and part of the Blackwater Valley in the north – national parks, market towns and countryside in the centre – to the Solent area in the south. Despite being around 70% of the population of the Manchester combined authority, it covers more than three times the area – but will have 50% fewer constituent members on its Combined Authority.

It is hard to see how local villages and market towns will see the authority as capable of addressing their concerns given this structure - particularly in the county area where there will be 714,000 people per single representative. The lack of district representation also means that the principal councils closest to residents and operating on a more local scale cannot fulfil this gap.

This is also the main area where the unbalanced governance proposed risks poorer reflection of the interests and needs of the central and northern part of the area. The County area has 70% of the population (1.5m people), but only 2 representatives (40% of constituent member representation) vs. the unitaries have 60% of representation, but only 30% of the population.

This leaves the interests and needs of the northern and central areas heavily under-represented despite their significant population and contribution to the national, regional and Combined Authority economy.

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