

## **Please give any views and comments on the devolution powers in general**

UNISON North West broadly welcomes the formalisation of 'Greater Manchester' (GM) as a different scale for:

- broadening the range of public services and public budgets that are subject to democratic governance through accountable structures
- pursuing economic development across and within a 'City-Region' footprint
- planning and delivering full spectrum public service provision at the optimum scales within a framework of relevant national standards and appropriate locality determinations.
- pursuing social dividend and community benefit outcomes across the whole City-Region.

We wish to contribute positively to the devolution and redesign agenda in GM. In particular, we welcome the establishment of the Workforce Engagement Board and the Health & Social Care Engagement Forum and look forward to good working relationships at a GM level cascading down to the locality level. It is encouraging that decision-makers in GM explicitly recognise the importance of staff to high quality public services, the importance of high quality public service employment to the wider GM economy and society and the positive role of trade unions as collective representatives and 'stakeholders'.

## **Give your comments on housing, regeneration and planning: (including 'Spatial Development Strategy', 'Community Infrastructure Levy', 'Mayoral Development Corporations', 'Land Commission')**

### *Housing*

Social rents are 40% lower than the average private rent in England. The private rented sector is characterised by weak tenancy rights and often low quality. We believe that social housing has an important role to play in ensuring there is sufficient affordable housing in GM. We are concerned about cuts to the rental income available to housing associations and councils which are predicted to cut back plans for new-build social homes by at least 25,000 across the country. It is important that plans for 10,000 new homes in Greater Manchester include provision for social housing.

In its consideration of sites for building new homes, it is important that the GM Land Commission ensures that public buildings are kept in our communities to ensure that public services are accessible to people across GM.

More generally, there is a need for higher household incomes to enable people to afford their rent or mortgage costs. In efforts to ensure that housing is affordable, consideration must be given to wage levels.

### *Regeneration*

We want people and businesses to be attracted to GM by the high quality of life – through excellent public services, skills, broadband, energy and transport.

We want to avoid devolution to the Northern cities resulting in destructive competition for business investment through tax incentives or deregulation. We are concerned too by the

possibility of gentrification of our city centre – with wonderful new buildings – but limited benefits for the people who live here.

We believe that there is some scope for devolution achieving improvements in economic performance and/or reductions in social need but we believe that policy-makers should be cautious about over-committing to this. GM has a long way to go to be fiscally self-sufficient, and we believe that this may not be achievable for some time. It would be wrong if social need was unmet due to an overly-ambitious fiscal target.

**Give your comments on bus ‘franchising’ and transport:**

We are very supportive of efforts to develop an integrated public transport system in Greater Manchester. It is important that public transport is easily affordable, accessible and environmentally-friendly.

**Give your comments on highways:**

Highways are central to the effective movement of people and goods, as part of an integrated system. The importance of defining and maintaining primary routes across and into/out of the City-Region is self-evident. But we must also remember that on a day-to-day basis roads, pavements, paths and tracks play a crucial (if often taken for granted) role in shaping individual and local community lives; providing the direction and landscape for journeys in many forms to work, school, leisure and public places. It is therefore critical to vibrant communities that highways are seen as being an intrinsic part of the built environment and not merely a route between points.

**Give your comments on education and skills:**

We are concerned about the pressures on further education (FE) colleges to consider mergers as a consequence of inadequate central government funding and the Area Review process. Where an FE college is not independent it may be less focused on the needs of the locality where it is based, students may experience higher travel time and costs, and some young people may be deterred from undertaking college courses

We note that while the Combined Authority is undertaking an important role in education for 16-19 year-olds, local authorities are playing a diminishing role in the planning and support of pre-16 education due to the prevalence of academy schools. We believe that it is important that school provision is properly planned and democratically accountable.

We are supportive of the increased number of apprenticeships but believe there needs to be greater emphasis on their quality. Apprentices need to receive high quality training in safe working environments. Unions can play a key role in helping to ensure that apprenticeships are not exploitative and that young people benefit.

**Give your comments on fire and rescue and police:**

We note that governance arrangements for fire and rescue are to be the subject of a subsequent review.

UNISON represents support staff in both the police and fire services and we have serious concerns about any moves toward the integration of these functions. The needs, skills and

knowledge of the services are very different and a requirement for generic working would add to pressures on already overstretched emergency workers.

**Give your comments on health:**

UNISON North West submitted a response to the public consultation on the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Locality Plan 'Taking Charge' in February 2016. A number of issues were raised in our response and we are currently unclear as to whether and how these will be acted upon – i.e. whether there will be a final post-consultation version of the Plan. Our concerns include:

- the lack of employee and trade union involvement in the production of the Plan
- the lack of focus on improving the quality of employment as a means of improving health outcomes and the absence of any plan to implement the living wage at a Greater Manchester scale
- the implications on our members delivering public services of new delivery models, standardisation of clinical support and back office functions, and more flexibility across organisational and geographical boundaries. We again reiterate the importance of adhering to Agenda for Change terms and conditions in any change process. We believe that health service delivery and employment in Greater Manchester should be very much part of the National Health Service.
- our willingness to be involved in a skills agenda that up-skills staff to work in multi-disciplinary integrated neighbourhood teams.
- the inadequacies of strategically important activities that are currently largely provided by the private sector (i.e. adult social care and child care).
- the language around a 'new deal with the public' that implies that those who adopt unhealthy lifestyles may not receive services.
- the difficulties with central government policies (e.g. academisation, ending bursaries) working against plans for joined-up services and strategies in Greater Manchester.

The full consultation response from February is available by email.