



Submission to the public consultation on the formation of a Lancashire Combined Authority

February 2016

UNISON represents over 23,000 members working in local government services across Lancashire. We also represent members in health, transport, the police service, further and higher education, fire and probation - all areas that could be affected by the devolution agenda. Our members and their families are public service users and all have an interest in the quality and accessibility of services. As citizens of Lancashire we also want the area to be economically prosperous and democratically-engaged. Devolution is of great importance to UNISON members, and devolution will best achieve its aims with the engagement and support of UNISON members.

In general terms, UNISON North West sees both opportunities and threats in the devolution agenda. UNISON believes that devolution has the potential to deliver real benefits for Lancashire and we want to play our role in working towards:

- Greater public and civil society engagement in democratic decision-making.
- Economic growth that is environmentally sustainable and provides high quality jobs.
- Protecting public services, making the best use of the county's resources and getting the funding we need for services in Lancashire.

The Lancashire Combined Authority Proposal

UNISON North West believes that the Government clearly intends to pursue its devolution agenda over the coming years such that areas without a combined authority could be at risk of disadvantage. Councils in Lancashire have been badly affected by central government funding cuts over recent years and can ill-afford any impediment to accessing resources. UNISON North West therefore believes that it is sensible and prudent for councils in the county to establish a Lancashire Combined Authority (LCA).

We are committed to engaging with the devolution process, to being involved as key stakeholders in decisions that affect our members in public services, and to play our

part in wider efforts to improve the economic outlook and quality of life for people in Lancashire.

We regard it as appropriate that the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will be a non-constituent member of the LCA, without voting rights. We would like consideration to be given to extending the range of non-constituent members of the LCA. The LCA will have influence over services covering many thousands of trade union members, so we believe it would be appropriate to include a trade union representative as a non-constituent member. A frequent criticism of other areas' combined authority processes has been the lack of democratic oversight and public involvement. The LCA has an opportunity to develop arrangements that are more inclusive. It would be appropriate for unions to be involved as stakeholders in high-level policy discussions about the economic, democratic and social future of Lancashire.

It is likely that plans and decisions made on a combined authority scale will impact on employment in public services. It is very important that the employment impact of LCA-level decisions is considered at an early stage and that there are robust mechanisms in place for information-sharing and consultation. In Greater Manchester, a Workforce Engagement Board has been established at the combined authority level. It is likely that the LCA will need a similar type of structure, that takes account of the different employment responsibilities of different authorities (Unitary, County, District). Staff working in public services are key to the success of the devolution agenda and it is important to proceed with staff engagement, support and enthusiasm. Robust consultative mechanisms are crucial in achieving this.