UNIVERSITY OF
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Heseltine Institute
for Public Policy,
Practice and Place

UNLEASHING THE POTENTIAL OF DEVOLUTION IN ENGLAND

INSIGHTS FROM THE HESELTINE INSTITUTE POLICY BRIEFINGS

Contents

The images included in this publication were taken by Merseyside-based photographer Roger Sinek as part of a collection illustrating change in the urban realm across Liverpool City Region. The images selected here highlight some of the challenges English devolution is designed to address, in areas such as regeneration, housing and transport.

View from Everton Park, Liverpool

Introduction

There is now widespread recognition in the British political mainstream of the importance of cities and city-regions in improving social and economic outcomes across the UK. The last decade has seen the introduction of devolution mostly centred around city-regions, and almost half of England's population is now represented by a directly elected 'metro' mayor. The new Labour government is committed to maintaining and extending the powers of these new institutions. However, England remains a highly centralised nation, with relatively few policy and fiscal levers available to local and regional leaders. Combined authorities and mayors have also emerged into an already complex institutional landscape, with successive governments grappling with the challenge of implementing change in the economy and public services.

How then do English devolved institutions become more effective at influencing local and regional outcomes? How can we move beyond the ad hoc, contractual relationships that have characterised relations between central government and sub-national bodies over the last decade? What can we learn from the last decade of English devolution that will help local and regional leaders develop and implement policy?

Since 2020, the Heseltine Institute's policy briefings have provided a space for academics, policymakers and practitioners operating at the vanguard of England's devolution revolution. The pieces included in this collection provide valuable insights not only into how devolution has developed over recent years, but how mayors and combined authorities can build and use their power to bring change.

The briefings tackle three key questions which we believe are crucial to answer if English devolution is to become genuinely embedded in the institutional fabric of our political systems and bring a less centralised, more effective way of governing.

What is the vision for English devolution?

To date, there has been a lack of clarity and coherence about the purpose of devolution in England. Have mayors and combined authorities been introduced to bring public services closer to the people they represent, essentially acting as delivery vehicles for national government policy priorities? Or are these new regional institutions designed to govern in their own right, developing and implementing their own place-based policy responses? While institutional reform has in Britain historically been carried out in an ad hoc fashion, with new sub-national organisations 'muddling along' in their relations with national governments, addressing these questions will be an important step in developing a clear vision for English devolution.

In the first briefing in this collection, **Georgina Blakeley** and **Brendan Evans** (University of Huddersfield) provide insights into how mayors have sought to make the most of their relatively limited formal powers to implement their policy priorities. In a study of the first mayoral terms of Andy Burnham in Greater Manchester and Steve Rotheram in Liverpool City Region, they highlight the importance of soft power and collaboration for mayoral success, particularly in policy areas such as housing and economic growth. The briefing suggests mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) work best when they are brokers of relationships across the regions they represent, building on local strengths and the achievements of devolution in recent years. This important account of two of the most high-profile metro mayors illustrates the changing character of the office and reflects on how it might evolve further still over the coming years.

The second briefing included is a fascinating viewpoint from within a combined authority, highlighting the work undertaken to develop a distinct approach to economic development which utilises local assets and acknowledges the particular local circumstances the organisation operates in. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority officers **Adrian Nolan** and **Tim Jago** discuss the Plan for Prosperity, now a core part of the combined authority's strategy. The briefing sets out how devolution is helping to tackle long-standing and entrenched issues such as deprivation, low employment and poor health, demonstrating the potential of combined authorities to develop and deliver genuinely place-based and targeted policies. What additional resources and powers do combined authorities need to deliver the kind of policies sketched out in this briefing?

Has English devolution so far been a missed opportunity?

A decade on from the introduction of combined authorities and into the third term of the first wave of metro mayors, has devolution in England met

expectations? What are the limitations to the current approach to devolution?

The history of British regional policy is littered with abandoned initiatives, discarded slogans and abolished institutions. While the future of metro mayors and combined authorities looks secure for the foreseeable future, the purpose of regional policy remains in flux. 'Levelling Up' looks set to be consigned to the dustbin of political slogans under the new Labour government, but the issues the agenda sought to address are unlikely to disappear. In his analysis of the 2022 Levelling Up the UK white paper, Professor **Michael Parkinson** (Honorary Fellow at the University of Liverpool and Ambassador for the Heseltine Institute) argues for a clear spatial focus and long-term funding for devolution, suggesting that "if everything matters, nothing matters". Illustrating impressive foresight, the briefing suggests the white paper "will simply gather dust since it is not clear how long the current government will last...but even if the government does change, it is crucial to continue this work". Can a new government with a large majority deliver a more enduring regional policy?

One area where devolution has undoubtedly struggled is in incorporating a diverse range of participants and perspectives. While the 2024 local elections saw the number of women metro mayors increase from one to three (from a total of 12), there remain concerns about a lack of diversity in leadership positions. In her briefing, **Emma Ormerod** (Senior Lecturer in Economic Geography at Newcastle University) argues that devolution so far has been 'masculine-coded', with notions of competition, growth and 'strong-man' leadership limiting the scope of policy thinking and development. The briefing argues for an approach to diversity in regional leadership which goes beyond representation, allowing more flexibility for sub-national institutions to do things differently. Failure to integrate a more diverse range of views, backgrounds and experiences will limit the potential of devolution to achieve genuine economic and social change.

How might English devolved institutions develop, evolve and adapt?

As mayors and combined authorities have an increasing impact on the lives of the communities they represent, how they adapt to a new political environment created by the first Labour government in 14 years will be a critical question. There are calls in some quarters to 'fill in' the devolution map and homogenise the structures of devolution across

England. Heseltine Institute co-director **Catherine Durose**, writing with **Vivien Lowndes** (Professor Emerita of Public Administration and Policy at the University of Birmingham), caution against this view and promote the value of viewing devolution as 'incomplete'. Rather than seeing devolution as something that should be homogenised, incompleteness can be an asset, opening up devolution to more diverse voices and providing "a lens for policymakers to make sense of the sub-national policy landscape" to work in non-traditional ways and incorporating practices such as co-production. The briefing has implications for devolution policy over the coming years and calls for caution on the rollout of a 'one size fits all' Mayoral Combined Authority model across England.

The final briefing in this collection demonstrates a future model of devolution based on partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors. In a landscape where most MCAs will continue to have limited formal powers, their convening role will be crucial for the future design and delivery of local programmes to address resident and business needs. This collaborative piece by **Anne Green** and **Abigail Taylor** (City-REDI), and **Sue Jarvis** and **Belinda Tyrrell** (Heseltine Institute) discusses the results of a pilot project exploring the role of MCAs in improving employment outcomes. Operating in a complex environment of skills, employment and welfare policy, the briefing highlights the value of cross-sector, place-based working at a scale only MCAs can deliver at.

As this collection demonstrates, MCAs are now established as part of the political furniture there is a remarkable degree of mainstream consensus on the need to retain and enhance their powers and responsibilities. However, the sub-national institutions introduced in England over the last decade are still maturing. Combined authorities are likely to be tasked with delivering on a range of policy priorities central to the missions of the new Labour government, but giving these nascent organisations more responsibilities and resources is only one aspect of decentralising power. Equally important will be to develop a coherent vision of what devolution is for, underpinned by improved public understanding and engagement. By the time of the next metro mayor elections in 2028, some of these now household names will have been in power for over a decade. If the last few years are anything to go by, the national political landscape may shift dramatically again, but these leaders will increasingly be judged as political operators (and MCAs as political institutions) in their own right.

Georgina Blakeley and Brendan Evans

Steps in the right direction? Devolution in Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region: the first mayoral term

Key takeaways

1. Mayoral and combined authority engagement in policy activity, for example, returning the buses to public control or controlling how the Adult Education Budget is spent, helps to shape and evolve the office of the mayor and the combined authority

2. There are clear achievements in policy areas where activity has focused despite constraints and remaining challenges.

3. Achievements are clear in those areas where the mayor or the combined authority has formal power, but achievements can also be seen in areas where informal power has been used effectively.

4. While neither a democratic revolution nor a sham, local leaders were correct to grasp the offer of city-region devolution from central government.

5. Devolution remains constrained by the power of central government and a lack of financial resources and limited formal powers, but it can continue to be developed through policy activity.

1. The policy challenge of the missing middle

City-region devolution is the latest in a long line of attempts to solve the 'missing middle' in English politics and to tackle the difficult relationship between central and local government. City-region devolution in the form of mayoral combined authorities, initiated under New Labour and accelerated under the Coalition and Conservative governments, was a product of a set of circumstances including a rising conviction in agglomeration economics and the political and economic motivations of ministers such as George Osborne. These coalesced into an intellectual movement which argued for the alignment of functional economic areas with structures to facilitate 'place based' politics.

The agency and ambitions of local leaders in Greater Manchester (GM) such as Manchester City Council leader Sir Richard Leese and chief executive Sir Howard Bernstein, who had long conceived of policy on a GM footprint rather than the local authority area alone, ensured that GM would become the prototype for a Combined Authority (CA) and later a Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA). Leaders in the Liverpool City Region (LCR) who had worked actively to strengthen partnership working across the boroughs through initiatives such as City of Culture in 2008 were anxious to seize the same opportunities as their neighbour and thus ensured they were also in the first wave of city-region devolution when combined authorities were established in 2014.

2. Evolving the office through policy activity: transport

The idea of a missing middle layer of governance was symptomatic of the view that England is an overly centralised state compared to other industrialised nations and that this overcentralisation partly accounts for the poor economic growth and productivity in cities across England. Our research into the first mayoral term of office in GM and LCR, which underpinned the publication of our book Devolution in Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region (Blakeley and Evans, 2023) involved extensive interviews, focus groups, participant

observation and scrutiny of documentation. The resulting analysis showed that the policy activity of Andy Burnham in GM and Steve Rotheram in LCR, working with and through their combined authorities, can make a difference.

Transport is the policy field where the metro-mayors were directly accorded their principal hard power and here they certainly demonstrated to the public the worth of their office, in Burnham's case by returning the buses to public control which was the main reason for GM's council leaders accepting Osborne's insistence on establishing a directly elected metro-mayor. Both metro-mayors also benefited from the opportunity to extend existing successful initiatives. Burnham extended the functioning tram system and Rotheram was able to enhance an already well-regarded public transport system in LCR.

Yet the two metro-mayors were also compelled to join a dense policy network, ultimately dominated by the Department for Transport which limited their ability to seize the initiative. Moreover, on the central question of HS2 and its connection to Liverpool and the need for a new underground station at Manchester Piccadilly to accommodate its role as the link between HS2 and the proposed Northern Powerhouse Rail, the Treasury and the Department for Transport used their power to frustrate. The future of these specific grand projects remains in doubt.

3. Evolving the office through policy activity: economic growth

While hard powers were concentrated in the transport field, the main governmental justification for the MCAs was to address economic imbalances. In the area of economic policy, the metro-mayors were prone towards boosterism and grand projects, but their clearest contributions lie in marrying economic policy with social objectives under the banner of inclusive growth.

Here they combined hard powers at their disposal such as control over strategic investment funds with soft powers such as the ability to convene actors and use their voice to draw attention to issues particularly the promotion of digitalisation, both in terms of infrastructure and inclusion, in line with their locally produced Industrial Strategies. Many examples of success can be cited. In the case of the LCR, the Shakespeare Theatre in Knowsley and local area-based initiatives such as the Knowledge Quarter and the Baltic Triangle illustrate the force which the mayoral combined authority could provide to advance existing initiatives which promote economic benefits to different parts of the city region.

In GM, Burnham used the power to establish mayoral development corporations to good effect to revitalise Stockport town centre. Other inclusive growth orientated initiatives such as the Good Employment Charter in GM and its equivalent, the Fair Employment Charter in LCR, relied on the convening powers of the metro-mayors. Also noteworthy were schemes such as Households into Work (LCR) and Working Well (GM) devolved to the CAs. Yet, despite such activity, the goal of inclusive growth remains a challenge for both city-regions. City-regions alone cannot attain inclusive growth and it and must also be evaluated within a much longer timeframe than a four-year term of office.

Both metro-mayors also had control over the Adult Education Budget and placed a lot of importance on developing skills and apprenticeships. The Adult Education Budget was overseen by the respective council leader portfolio holders and endorsed by the CAs. They adopted place-based strategies which rewarded existing providers with a good track record and supported new types of delivery which emphasised local priorities, including addressing the needs of local citizens currently far removed from the labour market. In the field of apprenticeships while the metro-mayors were proactive in encouraging the initiative they were frustrated by the reluctance of the Treasury to transfer the national underspend to the city-regions despite their constant lobbying.

4. Evolving the office through policy activity: housing

Housing and the related spatial development strategies represented a policy field in which hard powers and soft powers were mixed. Hard powers were devolved directly to the metro-mayors to establish mayoral development corporations, for example, and both metro-mayors were responsible for developing spatial development strategies although there was a difference of approach in each case. Soft powers were required to work with the individual authorities who were responsible for producing local plans to feed into the spatial strategies. Moreover, freedom to manoeuvre was heavily constrained by the need to use Government population growth forecasts and to meet Government imposed housing targets all while working within the National Planning Framework.

The withdrawal of Stockport from the ill-fated GM Spatial Framework (GMSF) was a visible political setback for Burnham and went some way to tarnishing the much-vaunted GM consensus. The GMSF, which then became Places for Everyone (or

the Plan of Nine) is a statutory planning document identifying strategic sites including green belt release. The LCR's Spatial Development Strategy, by contrast, is a land use planning framework which does not identify strategic development sites. As such, Rotheram did not have to spend as much political capital as Burnham. In addition, some local authorities had already taken the difficult decisions to build on the green belt. Soft powers, particularly the power to convene, were most to the fore in the focus of both metro-mayors on rough-sleeping. This was an ideological decision par excellence and revealed the extent to which a lack of hard powers could be countered by their use of generative power.

Although public service reform was one of the two pillars on which the argument for city-region devolution was built, progress in both MCAs has been nebulous and each struggled to evolve the office through activity in this field. In LCR, public service reform was done 'policy by policy' during the first term in office. The absence of any overarching strategy to public service reform made it harder to point to concrete achievements although it was claimed there were distinctive approaches to how the Housing First monies were spent or how the publicly owned train services were managed. In GM, by contrast, there was a whole systems approach which manifested in the production of overarching strategies such as the GM Public Service Reform strategy.

There was evidence of some progress in GM, but this was often more visible in individual authorities, for example, the Wigan Deal, rather than at a GM level. Even in the case of health, GM's aim to go 'further and faster' than other areas of the country went unmet although there is emerging evidence that health devolution had made some impact, despite the Covid pandemic, on increasing life expectancy (Britteon, 2022).

5. What next?

Carefully nurtured relationships are essential to devolution. It is thus important to avoid the temptation to focus just on the figureheads of the metro-mayors. The metro-mayors are in the delicate situation of being both apart from and entwined with the councils and the cabinet which they chair. This relationship requires the co-production of policy initiatives. Individual council leaders remain powerful in the combined authority model and power has not flowed up from the councils to the combined authority. The metro-mayors' role is still more complex as they are enmeshed in both upward relationships with Westminster and Whitehall in

a centralised state and downward relationships with voters and local leaders both those who are supportive and those who are critical. This produces a curious form of dual accountability. Moreover, the metro-mayoral constituency is both personal and party based.

In short, carefully nurtured relationships are vital to the success of devolution and so the future will be shaped by the degree to which trust can be engendered between the central and local state in the years ahead. Before the MCAs were established there were many who argued that they were simply a cynical 'poisoned chalice' or a 'devolution of austerity'. The MCAs in GM and the LCR, through their active evolution, have vindicated a different view. They are becoming more widely emulated as political structures as are the figures of metro-mayors. Yet it would be wrong to conclude that MCAs are irreversible. Their future is conditional, and they continue to face the tension of upward accountability to national government and downward accountability to voters.

The latest 'trailblazers', negotiated by GM and the West Midlands with central government, are testament to the relative success of city-region devolution and the contribution both Andy Burnham and Steve Rotheram have made to developing the office. They evidence, at least to some extent, Government's continued commitment to some form of devolution.

Yet, the trailblazers also show the continuing ad hoc and uneven approach to devolution and there were many in the LCR who were understandably aggrieved when they were not awarded one given the progress they had made. In GM, at least, the trailblazer deal enables Burnham to put policy substance on the aspirations he advanced in 2016 such as developing a Landlords Charter and introducing the integrated Bee Line transport system. On the other hand, his focus since 2016 on promoting opportunities for young people in the field of technical and vocational training by promoting a Manchester Baccalaureate appears to be obstructed by the resistance of the Department for Education to changing post-16 educational qualifications.

Devolution in England remains constrained by a preoccupied and divided central government which, at best, remains committed to a piecemeal, ad-hoc approach to devolution in which the transactional skills of local council leaders are the crucial factor in terms of gaining devolved powers. The combined impact of city-region structures and the Government's apparent proclivity for expanding

the size of existing local units appears to mark the death knell of traditional regionalism. With a General Election a year away, the Labour Party appears to be rhetorically committed rather than entirely clear about its proposals for further English devolution. MCAs thus remain to a large extent vulnerable to the whims of central government and are constrained by a dearth of financial resource, exacerbated by the slashing of the budgets of city councils since 2010, and insufficient powers at their disposal.

Yet, despite these constraints, Steve Rotheram and Andy Burnham, working through their respective combined authorities have contributed to evolving the new office of the metro-mayor by emphasising their place-based as much as their party credentials. More recently elected metro-mayors, for example Tracey Brabin in West Yorkshire, are now seeking to emulate many of their policies such as returning the buses to public control. There are also encouraging, if incipient signs, of the metro-mayors acting as a collective force within English politics.

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Widnes High Street

About the authors

Georgina Blakeley is Professor of Democracy and Governance at the University of Huddersfield. She has published widely in the area of democracy and governance in England and Spain.

Brendan Evans is currently Emeritus Professor of Politics at the University of Huddersfield. His research interests focus on political ideas and their impact on policy making in British and American Politics.

Georgina and Brendan have co-authored two books: The Regeneration of East Manchester: a political analysis (2013) and their latest book Devolution in Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region: The first mayoral term (2023).

Adrian Nolan and Tim Jago

Delivering shared prosperity for Liverpool City Region

Key takeaways

1. Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has recently published its 'Plan for Prosperity'. An overarching strategy for a Fairer, Stronger, Cleaner City Region, the Plan offers a holistic, long-term view of the local economy and place, its key strengths and challenges, as well as the ways it can deliver meaningful prosperity in its widest sense and in doing so, truly "level up".

2. As a 'Place of Pioneers', the strategy outlines how Liverpool City Region (LCR) can rebalance and renew its economy through a holistic approach to innovation: one that capitalises on existing local strengths across industry and academia, arts and culture, and social innovation.

3. However, delivering prosperity for all people and places will also require the core foundations of the local economy to be significantly strengthened. This means continued focus on and investment in local skills, infrastructures, and place-shaping, all underpinned by a long-term emphasis on inclusivity and the transition to net zero.

4. Maximising the opportunities offered by devolution, and utilising the full value of local knowledge, responsibility, and accountability, will be required to truly shift the dial on the key challenges – entrenched deprivation, low employment and skills levels, and poor health and wellbeing – that LCR has experienced across many decades, and improve LCR's contribution to national prosperity.

5. Ultimately, successful delivery of shared prosperity is a long-term endeavour. It will rely on developing a truly collaborative leadership approach – underpinned by devolution –and working collectively as one City Region, with a collective understanding of what success looks like for all people and places.

1. Introduction

We are living and operating through a time of ongoing change and challenge – politically, economically, environmentally and socially – where it is all too easy to become overly focused on the short term. This is not to minimise the importance of critical issues that, collectively, the country is facing at the moment – inflation and a cost-of-living crisis, for example – but emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic and facing a deepening climate emergency provides an opportunity to think about how the future economy is to be structured and how it can offer meaningful prosperity for all residents and communities. This requires consideration across pivotal and broad issues including rebalancing and renewing the economy, strengthening its structural foundations, and how to effectively deliver on shared priorities through devolution and wider public service reform.

As a starting point for this, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority has published its 'Plan for Prosperity'. This is an overarching strategy; an anchor point for the City Region's long-term priorities and principles, that is based on a strong understanding of its key strengths and challenges. Prosperity means different things to different people and organisations. In Liverpool City Region, it flows directly from the Combined Authority's vision for a Fairer, Stronger, Cleaner City Region, meaning that prosperity encapsulates more than traditional measures of economic growth. It is a blend of improving personal health, wealth and opportunity; creating thriving neighbourhoods and places; promoting successful and productive businesses that create good quality employment; and nurturing a healthy and protected natural environment. The way to achieve shared prosperity is through undertaking and delivering a holistic and long-term view of economy and place and setting out ways of doing things differently from the past.

2. How can Liverpool City Region meaningfully deliver prosperity?

A: Rebalancing and renewal

In a globalised world which is interconnected like never before, it is critically important for localities to consider how they can become more globally competitive. In Liverpool City Region, there are a number of nationally leading, distinctive strengths and opportunities that will help close the economic gap with national and international comparators. The Plan for Prosperity confirms the City Region as a 'Place of Pioneers' and looks at this proposition in a holistic way. It outlines a complete innovation offer where invention, creativity, and a willingness to do things differently, is embraced at the interface of industry and academia, in arts and culture, and across communities.

This proposition both informs and supports the key strategic priorities set out in the Plan for Prosperity, based around delivering a truly inclusive economy, becoming pioneers of the Green Industrial Revolution, and fully expanding its global reach.

1. Building on world leading innovation assets, capabilities, and competitive strengths. The City Region is home to several distinctive world leading innovation specialisms, including high performance computing and AI; infection; and materials chemistry. In addition to this are major strengths relating to the drive towards net zero innovation from Mersey Tidal, to hydrogen, offshore wind, glass decarbonisation,

and sustainable packaging. These global capabilities, combined with assets such as Knowledge Quarter Liverpool, Sci-Tech Daresbury, and a strong innovation project pipeline, provide a strong and resilient foundation for the City Region to lead the way in transformational strengths and competitive advantages, from health innovation and industrial digitisation that supports trailblazing manufacturers, through to the development of the technologies and clusters that will help in meeting local and national net zero carbon targets. The City Region is well placed to help deliver on the Government's target of the equivalent of 2.4% GDP investment in Research and Development (R&D). Indeed, it has its own ambitious target for investment reaching 5% of the City Region's GVA by 2030.

This reflects the fact that a number of other places outside the Greater Southeast that have the demonstrable potential to do so – the City Region being one of these - will need to significantly over-deliver above the average on their own R&D investment in order to achieve the national target. Combined with its strategic position as a pre-eminent western global gateway for the UK economy (further anchored by the Liverpool Freeport), the Plan's innovation and competitive advantage-led proposition demonstrates that there is a major opportunity for the City Region to build upon its world-renowned strengths and reputation to become a leading asset for the country as the UK establishes new commercial ties around the world.

Figure 1: Plan for Prosperity summary (LCRCA Plan for Prosperity 2022)

Realising our vision	• A Fairer City Region. • A Cleaner City Region. • A Stronger City Region.
Capitalising on our distinctive proposition	A Place of Pioneers: our deep, holistic, and distinctive innovation offer
Achieving our strategic priorities	• An inclusive City Region where levelling up means no-one and no place is left behind. • Pioneers of the Green Industrial Revolution. • A global, confident and outward looking City Region.
Strengthening the pillars of our economy	• Maximising the impacts of innovation for people, places, and businesses. • Turning people's potential into prosperity. • Thriving, sustainable and resilient places. • Integrated infrastructure for a connected City Region.

Enhancing our resilience	Renewing our economy	Delivering shared prosperity

2. Optimising the City Region's strengths as a Global Cultural Capital. Liverpool City Region is internationally renowned for its cultural vibrancy, creativity, and visitor economy offer, with the highest density of arts, entertainment, and recreation jobs outside of London. Whilst the pandemic deeply impacted on the culture, creative and visitor economy sectors, the long-term foundations of LCR remain strong. The City Region aims to continue to innovate in enhancing its cultural offer and so further support its attractiveness as a visitor destination, as well as supporting market demand, readiness, and resilience to drive the post-pandemic recovery of the visitor economy. Culture will also become central to approaches that help bind communities together, support people's health and wellbeing, and improve quality of life. It will also be key to broader internationalisation activities, as a significant component of the City Region's brand development.

3. A leader in social innovation. An economy that delivers prosperity must enable social innovation to support communities in a variety of ways, from addressing socio-economic issues, through to providing skills and employment opportunities. Liverpool City Region has a longstanding reputation for social innovation, and the social economy will continue to play a critical role in building community capacity, managing assets and delivering services. A central focus will be the further deepening of the relationship between the social economy, public services, and businesses. Social innovation is also about evolving how public services are delivered. The City Region continues to be at the cutting edge of new, systemic ways of supporting people and places, through asset based and integrated approaches, demonstrated by programmes such as Housing First, Ways to Work, and Households into Work. Working with Government, it aims to make such innovations mainstream to deliver for people and places at scale, and to continuously innovate in driving public service reform.

B: Building on the structural foundations of economic prosperity

The key strategic priorities and proposition set out within the Plan for Prosperity can only be supported and delivered by strengthening the core foundations of the economy, all of which are interdependent. This means focus and investment on local skills, infrastructures, and place-shaping, all underpinned by a long-term view on inclusivity (including improving health equity) and the transition to net-zero. The Plan seeks to address these in a comprehensive way, which is summarised below.

1. Maximising the impacts of innovation for people, places and business. Innovation and knowledge assets need to benefit the whole City Region – supporting businesses to become more innovative, helping to provide local and global solutions to pressing challenges, and to both provide opportunity and raise aspirations across our communities. Within this, the business base needs to be driven by an established 'innovation first' culture where, through targeted support, the scale, speed, and scope of innovation will be increased. Ultimately, this 'innovation first' culture must promote the adoption and diffusion of innovation to drive productivity boosting practices throughout the business base. An innovation ecosystem needs to also reflect the City Region's commitment to delivering an inclusive economy. This means working together with organisations such as schools, colleges, universities, skills providers, and innovation clusters to build upon existing outreach work and will help ensure that the progress made through the innovation ecosystem spills over positively into all our neighbourhoods. The Knowledge Quarter Liverpool innovation district is currently leading work in this area, and has set out an aspiration to spread the benefits of innovation activity (Sinclair and Cook 2021).

2. Turning people's potential into prosperity. Removing the multiple barriers to prosperity will provide the opportunity for all people to have a good quality of life and be able to use their potential to lead prosperous lives. By working to improve educational attainment, upskilling, reskilling, supporting people into employment, systemically improving health outcomes, and attracting and retaining talent, the Plan for Prosperity sets out the priorities to develop a healthy, happy population, and a deep pool of skilled labour and innovative entrepreneurship that maximises prosperity and productivity.

3. Thriving, sustainable, and resilient places. Strengthening the vitality of the City Region's communities is central to long term transformation in the wider economy. The Plan sets out how the City Region will achieve this through developing and enabling a high-quality housing stock that meets need, provides choice, and supports good health and wellbeing; and ensuring neighbourhoods are sustainable and designed to enable people and places to flourish. From reimagined and thriving urban spaces, to a wealth of culture, high quality, accessible and attractive natural spaces, utilising the strengths of community-driven place-making the City Region will aim to use its distinctive international brand to be a leading place to live, work and invest.

4. Integrated infrastructure for a connected City Region. The overarching aim is to transform the City Region's infrastructure in a strategic and integrated way to support sustainable economic growth, improve public health, attract investment, and link people and businesses to opportunities across the City Region and beyond. The Plan sets out a vision for modern, future-ready infrastructure, that will be clean, sustainable, and accessible, supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation. A clear focus on providing a London-style transport system and a major increase in digital connectivity (through LCR Connect) will be complemented by prioritising a joined-up approach to enhance the City Region's natural capital, enhancing and sustaining its highly significant green and blue spaces.

5. Foundations that support the drive towards an inclusive economy. Perhaps the most important principle underpinning the Plan for Prosperity is inclusivity, and these structural foundations need to ultimately combine in supporting this aim. In any economic development intervention, the primary question that needs answering is: who is this benefitting? The answer has to always be local people and communities. This is even more important in places such as Liverpool City Region, where there are long-standing, deep-rooted challenges relating to deprivation, employment and skills, and poor health that hold too many people back, prevent the City Region achieving its full economic potential. One of the Plan's central themes, therefore, is for a consistent emphasis on this principle across all policies, investments, and activities. Furthermore, approaches such as community wealth building will need to become fully embedded within policy and practice. The ultimate aim is an 'inclusive system' at the heart of economic development.

C: Delivering through genuine devolution

The Plan for Prosperity sets out a proposition for how the City Region wants to work more collaboratively with Government. This includes focusing on the potential offered by devolution to both maximise the City Region's transformational opportunities and distinctive assets, and to begin to make meaningful inroads into the structural challenges and inequalities that it faces. Liverpool City Region knows what it is good at and what its strengths are, and equally it has a granular understanding of the long-standing challenges which confront communities, and how these need to be addressed. This local knowledge and insight are illustrated in the Plan for Prosperity's evidence base, which itself builds on the extensive evidence gained from the Local Industrial Strategy: the 'LCR Listens' programme of engagement

included 2,500 members of the public and over 300 stakeholders from industry, academia, and the social economy.

1. The Local Industrial Strategy is the predecessor to the Plan for Prosperity. Industrial Strategy was the primary focus for national economic policy, but this was disbanded and superseded by a 'Plan for Growth', together with the focus on levelling-up and the recently produced White Paper.

To truly shift the dial on the issues that Liverpool City Region has experienced across many decades, a different approach is needed, which includes working with Government in maximising the effectiveness and opportunities offered by devolution, underpinned by a long-term view for change. Devolution with responsibility and accountability will make Liverpool City Region an exemplar for a fairer, stronger, and cleaner economy, and in doing so help it make a key contribution to the UK's economic ambitions and in levelling up.

3. Setting the principles for delivery

The Plan for Prosperity sets out a number of guiding principles, that are required for ensuring the realisation of the City Region's full potential and embracing the opportunity to do things differently. These include:

- Exploring and utilising the full potential that devolution offers, as discussed above. Collaboration by default: that delivers through constructive and effective partnerships, across the City Region, regionally, nationally and internationally.

- Community empowerment: the opportunities of devolution being extended to all communities across the City Region as much as possible.

- Agility and dynamism: being willing to take risks and pioneer new approaches.

- Accountability: openness and transparency that is driven by a culture of strong governance and continuous improvement.

Ultimately, successful delivery of shared prosperity is a long-term endeavour. It will rely on developing a truly collaborative leadership approach – underpinned by devolution – and working collectively as one City Region, with a collective understanding of what success looks like for all people and places.

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Birkenhead Bus Station

St James Centre, Birkenhead

About the authors

Adrian Nolan is Senior Policy Lead for Economy at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Tim Jago is Senior Policy Lead for Place and Net Zero at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Michael Parkinson

The Levelling Up the UK White Paper: what's the problem?

Key takeaways

1. Nothing new under the sun: We have been here before with other White Papers about cities, regions and spatial inequality. Getting a White Paper right is a difficult balancing act, but this one is short on clarity, commitment, and cash.

2. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride: There are big questions about whether this paper proposes enough large-scale government interventions or offers the necessary powers or resources to local partners to deliver all its ambitious targets on an unrealistically tight timetable.

3. An eloquent silence on the big cities: There is a surprising silence about big cities generally and specifically on exactly how the UK's Core Cities - which contribute over half of the UK's productivity, but which underperform many European cities - are supposed to become 'globally competitive' in 8 years.

4. Raising expectation but reducing trust? The gap between the often-impressive analysis–done by researchers - and the actions promised by policy makers is simply too great. By promising more than it can deliver it runs the risk of increasing cynicism about and reducing public trust in politics and politicians.

5. Next steps – if everything matters, nothing matters: Government must move quickly and decisively to sort out the wheat from the chaff, the interesting from the important and draw up a clear, costed programme to be delivered by and with local partners that will make progress on these critical issues.

Writing a good White Paper – a delicate challenge

This long awaited and delayed Levelling Up White Paper (HM Gov 2022) is arguably the third major attempt to tackle structural, spatial inequality in the UK. The other two were the 1976 The Inner Cities (HM Gov 1976) produced by a Labour government and the 2000 Our Towns and Cities: The Future (DETR 2000) again produced by New Labour. Having been involved in preparing such documents for the UK Government and the European Commission (1997), I can sympathise with the authors. The issues themselves are 'wicked'. There are huge pressures involved in reconciling the competing demands of ministers, government departments, local authorities, advisers, think tanks, lobby groups in addition to extracting from the Treasury the scale of resources needed to meet the challenges demonstrated by extensive research and analysis.

This heady political cocktail means versions constantly chop and change and policy proposals come and go without any apparent justification. And the final versions rarely would win the Nobel Prize for literature.

When is a White Paper not a White Paper? When it is a jumble

But after reading this one I am left uncertain about the answers to two obvious questions: What is levelling up? And what is a White Paper? The dictionary defines it is 'a report or guide that informs readers about a complex issue and presents the issuing body's philosophy on the matter. It is meant to help readers understand an issue, solve a problem or make a decision.' Having read its over 300 pages it is hard to claim this document does that. It is a very hard read and you can barely see the wood for the trees. Less does not always mean more, but more often means less. It simply promises to do too much, on too many issues to convey the Government's real priorities or perhaps more importantly its real motives. It is short on clarity, commitment, and cash.

1976: The Inner Cities

By contrast, one of the best white papers ever written, this was a model of lucidity. It was just 20 pages long giving an elegant statement of the problems faced, the principles that should govern the response and a clear set of actions to meet them. It created Inner City Partnerships in the six biggest cities in the UK to tackle their social and economic problems which Michael Heseltine continued when the Conservative took over government in 1979, as he personally chaired the Liverpool Partnership itself. It formed the basis of urban policy for the next decade. The paper's most obvious problems were that it focused only on the inner cities; its partnership only involved the public and voluntary not the private sector; and it was introduced when the Callaghan Government had run out of money and the party was declared over. Nevertheless, it was the basis of something good.

2000: Our Towns and Cities - Delivering an Urban Renaissance

This was an improvement upon the 1976 paper. At the time I called it 'halfway to paradise' (Parkinson 2001). It had a clear vision of what it wanted cities to achieve - urban renaissance. It focused on the wider city boundaries, involved the private sector, identified economic opportunities as well as social need. It was based on a robust evidence base. It recognised the need to have economic, physical, and social approaches to the problem. It emphasised the importance of mainstream programmes rather than special regeneration initiatives and pots of money. It set up an Urban Policy Unit, a Cabinet Committee on Urban Affairs and convened a major Urban Summit. Despite those virtues, it still did suffer some of the problems of the current White Paper. It included too much discussion and defence of existing government policies, many of which were not particularly urban in intent or effect.

It was not clear it was willing the means as well as the ends. There was much rebadging of existing initiatives. It also trailed many initiatives that remained to be determined in practice. But as I wrote at the time, 'halfway to paradise' beat the realistic alternatives. And as my State of the English Cities (Parkinson et al 2006) report showed, it helped to improve the economic and social performance of many UK cities – despite the big gaps that remained between and within them. However, much of that progress has been undermined by the austerity policies of the subsequent decade.

2022: So what's the problem with the Levelling Up White Paper?

Apart from its length and scattergun approach, there are a series of key dilemmas at the heart of it which threaten to limit its potential impact.

A fatal gap between analysis and action. There is a huge gap throughout this paper between analysis and action. Almost a third of it is a review – albeit a good one – of prevailing academic theories about cities and regions showing how the UK underperforms its more successful European competitors with large gaps between and within places. There is little you will not know about the New Economic Geography and the drivers of change at the end of this analytical section. It is valuable and interesting. But really it should have been much shorter and sharper, setting the stage for action.

Previous policy failures corrected? This analytic section also identifies a series of previous policy failures: the lack of a long-term approach; failures in policy coordination; a lack of local empowerment; a shortage of evidence monitoring and evaluation; a lack of accountability and transparency. The problem is that current government policy does little to suggest that the lessons have been learned and will be built into future policy.

Future principles. The paper adopts a so-called mission-led approach, arguing that government policy must: improve transparency about place-based spending; hardwire spatial considerations into decision making and evaluation; improve coordination of national policies at local level; have a greater focus on local places, with central government officials understanding the needs of places much better. I would not demur from any of this. But again, it would be a stretch to claim this corresponds in any way with current government policy.

If wishes were horses, beggars would ride!

The policy programme consists of a set of very ambitious proposals across a wide range of fields where significant progress is supposed to be made and the gap between the best and worst performing places reduced in the next 8 years. It promises to: boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards; increase by 40% and shift the focus of R&D spending away from the south-east; make local public transport across the UK as integrated as that in London; improve digital connectivity; ensure 90% of

primary school children meet the expected standards in reading, writing and maths; increase the number of people who have completed high skills training; reduce the gap in health life expectancy between better off and deprived areas; improve the well-being of all people and reduce the gap between the best and worst performing places; improve pride of place and satisfaction with town centres and close the gap between the top performers and the rest; increase home ownership for renters and reduce the number of non-decent homes by 50%; reduce homicide, serious violence and neighbourhood crime in all areas; improve local leadership so all places have the choice of a devolution deal with increased powers and simplified funding.

Many of these targets are not well quantified and might just allow the Government to argue it has met its targets by 2030. But the absence of concrete, costed proposals combined with the decline in the capacity, resources, and powers of local authorities which would necessarily be heavily involved in delivering those targets, suggests this timetable is at the very least heroic. Wishing for things is different from making them happen.

Too many policy hints with not enough detail

There are in such a long document a whole range of interesting proposals about transport, research and development, culture, digital and net zero. Many of them are very welcome and must be explored. But too often they are just mentioned and left on the table. The remarks about regional leaders for levelling up or private sector-led partnerships are two such examples. The former cannot replace the Government Offices for the Regions. The latter may or may not replace LEPs but this a complex area where there have been many different approaches in the past. In both cases their remit, role, resources, and responsibilities are left totally vague. This is symptomatic of the whole document.

Follow the money!

The paper does not give serious enough attention to the resources that would be needed to address - let alone solve - the problems it identifies. The amounts of new money promised though, for example, the Towns Fund, the Levelling Up Fund, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Brownfield Housing Fund and Community Ownership Fund are relatively modest and are seriously outweighed by the cuts in resources to cities, towns and their local governments in the past decade of austerity. The financial base of many

cities has been and continues to be eroded.

Nevertheless, the paper specifically states that local leaders will be given the resources they need to level up their communities. Since government policy has been going in the opposite direction in the past decade it is hard to see how this will happen.

Local powers really matter

Much is rightly currently made of the German experience in levelling up east and west Germany and the difference in scale between the Federal government's actual and the UK's government's proposed levelling up resources. Much less attention has been paid to the decentralised nature of decision making in Germany – the legacy from the Allied powers occupation after the war – which means that German cities are the most powerful, best resourced and most successful in Europe. As my Second Tier Cities (Parkinson et al 2012) report for the European Commission showed, countries which are more decentralised with more powerful cities tend to have higher performing and better-balanced national economies. The Government was moving slowly in that direction until the fall from grace of Osborne, Heseltine, Clark, and O'Neill when the decentralising and empowering movement got becalmed. There is not enough in this document to suggest that central government is really going to reverse the trend and shift the balance of power significantly from national to local level. Much of the document discusses how central government will change its behaviour but much less about how it will enable and empower local places to change theirs.

An eloquent silence about the big cities

There is again a lack of clarity of the best spatial focus for policy. The thrust of policy in recent years has been - rightly in my view - towards city regions. By contrast this document plays far more to an agenda about the left behind towns. It talks of delivering physical regeneration to 20 such towns.

It promises to work with 20 places where there is ambition and leadership to maximise the impact of government expenditure to deliver transformational programmes. But apart from Sheffield and Wolverhampton it does not say which they will be, how they will be selected, and it does not seem they will get additional powers or resources. In fact, apart from interesting invitations to Manchester and Birmingham to be devolution Trailblazers and Innovation Accelerators the paper is rather silent

about the big cities. The recovery can't rest on two big places. And why these two and not others? The Government can't ignore Manchester because of the progress it has made, despite being a Labour stronghold. Presumably Birmingham was chosen because it is the only large city region controlled by the Conservative party. Despite this silence on the Core Cities which currently underperform their European competitors, it wants every region to have a globally competitive city inside 8 years. It says nothing in detail after a decade of austerity and cuts to money going into many of those cities how that will be achieved. This is wholly unrealistic.

Raising expectations – but reducing trust?

Throughout the document there is a large gap between the evidence about the scale of the challenge and the actual commitments to do anything substantial or new about them. I fear the pressure to say something about the country's most significant challenges may prove rather stronger than the pressure to do something about them. A deadline of 2030 to resolve such intractable problems – when it has taken two years to produce a document – is frankly ludicrous. Equally important, by raising expectations and promising more than it can deliver it runs the risk of increasing cynicism about and reducing public trust in politics and politicians when both these risks are currently very high.

Will the promised next steps really be taken?

The White Paper promises a lot will now happen to deliver the agenda including: the creation of an independent Levelling Up Advisory Committee; Ministerial visits to discuss plans and monitor progress; local delivery panels which will give advice to regional levelling up leaders; annual local progress reports which will feed into the Cabinet Levelling Up committee; local online spaces to encourage engagement and creativity. But there are real concerns whether too much has been left to consultation, bargaining and political whims at the next stage. Will the resources really be made available? Will there be enough political support

at the heart of government to drive the agenda through? Is this Government serious about delivering as well as discussing?

If everything matters, nothing matters!

This lack of priorities - the prizes for everyone syndrome - must be addressed if there is to be any meaningful and effective action by 2030. Government must move quickly and decisively to separate the wheat from the chaff, the interesting from the important and draw up a clear, costed programme to be delivered by and with local partners. It may be that this paper will simply gather dust since it is not clear how long the current Government will last. But even if the Government does change, it is crucial to continue this work. The challenges and opportunities it has outlined are hugely important. I wish this White Paper well - not ill. Perhaps a coherent programme can be rescued from it. But I trust this does not turn out be the triumph of hope over experience!

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About the author

Professor Michael Parkinson is an Honorary Fellow at the University of Liverpool and Ambassador for the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place. He was given a CBE in 2007 for his services to urban regeneration, and made Citizen of Honour of Liverpool in 2016.

Emma Ormerod

Levelling up gender inequality in the UK: Leadership and Development

Key takeaways

1. The UK continues to produce 'masculine coded' ways of seeing and understanding development and leadership. Notions of competition, growth, 'world-leading' or 'world-beating development' and 'strong-man leadership' limit thinking and policy making.

2. The UK Government's current Levelling Up agenda neglects deep-rooted gender inequality, and cannot therefore lead to rebalancing long-term geographic inequality: we need peopled and place-based approaches.

3. Gender is constructed differently across systems of power and geography, and policy makers, academics and practitioners need to pay attention to such inequalities, before offering solutions that often reproduce these.

4. Gender equality is not just about representation, nor should it be sidelined or reduced to 'body count' or 'tick-box' approaches, but more deeply embedded in agenda-setting and practices.

5. The role of women in development and leadership has been more significant than historic accounts have allowed, and this has denied the value of other forms of leadership that exist in places.

1. Introduction

Despite gender equality being a UN Sustainable Development Goal (Goal 5), women continue to be denied equal opportunity to shape and encounter urban and regional life, experiencing life through various barriers (physical, social, economic and symbolic) which are often invisible to many people. Just as understandings of 'gender' vary across times and places, so too do various gender inequalities (which are often complex and not about gender alone, but intersect with sexuality, race, ethnicity and class).

Past and present policy approaches aimed at addressing inequality within and between regions continue to be blinkered to gender inequality. 'Development' and place 'leadership' are spheres that continue to be dominated by men, as well as seen and analysed through a 'masculine gaze'.

We see this in notions of development being 'won' through selected competitions (where local authorities compete, for example, to renew high streets through the Future High Streets Fund or clean up chewing gum via the Chewing Gum Task Force). Development is also understood through growth-orientated lenses, positioned as world-leading, world-beating, delivered by strong-man/charismatic leaders. The current UK Government's policy approach to 'level up' longstanding geographical inequality is a case in point, but as this policy briefing outlines, more meaningful people and place-based policy approaches are urgently needed.

This policy briefing sheds light on the gendered dimensions of regional development and leadership in the UK. It draws on a recent paper to suggest that the UK's levelling up agenda needs to better understand and engage with the peopled nature of place-based inequality (the people as well as places 'left behind'). Not doing so will only maintain the deeply embedded inequalities in regional development and life.

2. Level with us, 'Levelling Up' is not for everyone

The UK government's levelling-up agenda is 'a moral, social and economic programme for the whole government' (Department

for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022). This is underpinned by the 2022 Levelling Up White Paper, which draws on accounts of historic development of cities and regions, and the drivers and geography of economic growth, in order to explain the inequality within and between places, alongside previous policy responses.

This selection and narration of development over time makes a familiar omission we see in the use of history: women. Often entirely absent from historic accounts of regional life, or reduced to passive bystanders, the 'absent presence' of invisible people (Crado Perez, 2019) shapes and limits how we see present inequalities and think about future alternatives. In its 297 pages, the Levelling Up White Paper does not mention gender inequality in the UK once. Nor does it feature explicitly in the 'capitals' or twelve 'missions', the metrics by which progress will be monitored as set out in the technical annex.

The White Paper does not acknowledge the well-documented range of gendered inequalities such as ongoing gender pay gaps, more precarious forms of employment (Women's Budget Group, 2023), and unequal amounts of unpaid domestic and care-based labour, many of which were exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, it focuses on selected ideas of development growth and competition. Furthermore, the White Paper calls for 'strong' and 'ambitious' place leadership, through devolution, to deliver levelling-up:

'The UK Government will proactively identify and engage with 20 places in England that demonstrate strong local leadership and ambition.' (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2022, p.208).

Firstly, such calls for 'strength' and 'ambition' are masculine-coded. They seek to target very particular ways of leading which embody traits such as overconfidence, competitiveness, aggression, risk-taking and charisma, which have come to dominate an increasingly narrow view of place leaders and authoritative power. Secondly, this call does not recognise the current inequality in place leadership: only one of England's ten Metro Mayors is a woman, and according to a report by IPPR in 2017 just 15% of local authority leaders in England were women.

There are now a series of emerging policies and programmes aligned to this agenda (as well as the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill currently going through parliament), which appear to bolster the dominant 'masculine-coded' grip on understandings of development and leadership. For example, the Levelling Up Fund is a competitive funding scheme which has been described in a recent Institute for Government report (2023) as ineffective; 'neither large enough nor targeted enough to make a dent in regional inequalities', not to mention underlying peopled inequalities. Research by the Guardian suggests that this fund has been unequally allocated, with Tory seats being awarded significantly more money per person than other equivalently deprived areas, amounting to 'pre-election bribes' from central government (Goodier et al, 2023).

Devolution is positioning leaders and decision makers as conduits for economic growth in limited ways. We further see this in a consultation to revise the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that policies 'empower local leaders across the country to attract investment, drive economic growth and grow the private sector'. At one point the consultation sets out a desire to 'understand if national planning policy should do more to enable local authorities to consider the safety of women and girls, or other vulnerable groups, when setting policies or making decisions'. The answer is of course yes, but safety and vulnerability are symptoms of deep rooted inequalities, which are not being addressed.

This male dominated and narrow understanding of sub-national development leadership matters; it impacts policy making and implementation. A lack of diversity in positions of power will mean we continue to overlook a range of inequalities. This is particularly difficult to uproot when women - especially women of colour - are excluded from positions of power across politics, business and public life through structural barriers, discrimination and harassment (Fawcett Society, 2020).

Whilst more diverse representation is an important step in place leadership, that alone will not necessarily lead to more equality. It is also a matter of changes in wider cultures and practices. For example, a report on Women in Planning by the Royal Town Planning Institute (2020) saw an overwhelming majority of respondents report that workplaces are still dominated by masculine culture and norms, leaving women planners feeling excluded and finding it necessary to adopt particular 'masculine' traits.

The stream of corporate 'self-help' literature that encourages women to 'lean in' to particular gendered ways of working and leading (how to dress, speak, behave) is very much part of this problem (Mahdawi, 2021). But learning might be taken from a small critical body of work which calls this masculinist and racialised grip on leadership out, and challenges current ways of working and enaction of power. For example, Helena Liu (2021: 9) seeks to disrupt the

'business' of leadership and its "beautiful illusion created by theorists and practitioners to capture our desires and sell development programmes".

3. Representation and Beyond

Shifting cultures, practices and representation is not a quick fix. It will take time and will face resistance, particularly since so much inequality continues to be unseen or denied. Attempts at developing policies through a gender equality perspective in 'gender mainstreaming' (an EU policy objective since 1997) in the UK have been hindered by systematic inadequacies (RTPI, 2021). We also know that policymakers can suffer from 'gender-fatigue' (Perrons, 2011), considering gender peripherally, and retrospectively, not as a fundamental part of a range of interlocking inequalities in society. It is not easy to see and counter the structures of power that have shaped how we think, and in turn shape policy. But we need to find new ways of identifying this inequality and thinking about various solutions.

Gender is constructed differently across systems of power and geography and we need to pay close attention to the representation of place leaders and policy makers, but also the social-relations and power involved in decision-making. This must move us past 'body count' or 'tick box' approaches, which see gender side-lined to tokenistic forms of inclusion, which do necessarily offer the range of perspectives and knowledge required to meaningfully share decision making, responsibility and power.

Having women involved in policy and decision making, and having focus on evidence makes a difference when tackling inequality. A 2019 report by Policy@Manchester, 'On Gender', sets out that female police and crime commissioners are twice as likely to make violence against women a priority, but where evidence on gender inequalities and women's experience of crime is available (and equality duties are taken seriously), all commissioners are more likely to prioritise violence against women. A further 2020 Policy@Manchester report 'Mind the Gap' strives to put current gender inequalities in Greater Manchester at the centre of the devolution agenda.

These reports have led Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) to establish a Women and Girl's Equity Panel, to ensure gender equality is considered across policymaking and decisions. This comes as GMCA agreed a '"Trailblazer" deeper devolution deal' with central government in March 2023, offering increased powers in policy areas and control over a single funding settlement; a potential solution to piecemeal pots of competitive centrally-held funding. Whilst the deal continues to be mired

in hubristic language of 'world-leading businesses', 'trailblazing', 'growth-driven', 'strong local leadership', developing robust and inclusive evidence, and listening to a range of voices will be key to GMCA's success, remembering that its leadership is already unequal (eight out of ten of the local authority leaders in Greater Manchester are currently men, led by Mayor Andy Burnham).

It will require a combined effort from policy makers, practitioners and academics to pay closer attention to the inequalities underpinning development and leadership and reject gender stereotypes and bias in how we 'value' certain leadership styles, even under the promise of decentralised power.

This could mean looking at (and valuing) alternative forms of leadership, including informal leadership that is already shaping places to push us beyond current understandings of the need for 'strong-man' and 'saviour' style leadership. A broader set of leadership qualities might include seeing 'strength' as being risk-averse, careful, and reflective (without falling into the trap of gender stereotypes).

The role of women in development and leadership has been more significant than historic accounts have allowed (Ormerod, 2023), and this continues to deny the value of leadership qualities in networks of care, reciprocity, mutuality and cooperation. The levelling-up agenda reproduces this selection and narration of a particular past which excludes certain people, offering 'masculine-coded' solutions which limit the way we can begin to imagine alternative futures.

4. Conclusions

The 'masculine-coded' visions and calls for leadership and development in the levelling-up agenda - whilst pitched to be a devolution of power - will not lead to equality if they continue to maintain systems of white patriarchal organisation. This needs challenging by a range of people.

We cannot continue to rely on narrowly selected and biased accounts of history that categorise and exclude people when thinking about present geographical inequalities and future solutions; we need peopled and place-based approaches which are better attuned to inequalities. As part of this, it is imperative to recognise that formal place leadership opportunities continue to exclude women. This exclusion is impacting the agenda-setting policy-making of places.

Whilst increased devolution powers offer an opportunity for localities and regions to address deep rooted inequalities, this will not happen if: a)

focus is entirely on narrow, GDP-led understandings of growth and development, propped up with insufficient funding fought for through competitions; b) there is a continued oversight of inequalities, such as gender, with lacking representation, inclusion and evidence; and c) we continue this 'romance' with leadership and masculinity (Liu, 2021) as a solution. To level-up meaningfully might need devolved places to re-establish their own development 'missions', monitoring metrics (including health, wellbeing, care and quality of life) and scrutiny. It may also involve re-thinking current models of sub-national leadership and boards, which do not currently offer diversity of voices or equal access. Resisting this requires a language and imagination beyond current neoliberal modes of governing regional development.

Ignoring a range of inequalities will prevent meaningful change, and will continue to be an injustice for everyone. This is a challenge for academics as much as policy makers - what is researched and taught can uphold practices in how we train future planners, architects, development consultants, economists and leaders. It is time to challenge these specific and selected visions of place leadership and development which are mired in hubris and sensational language, and have a current grip on our economic, political and social organisation.

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About the author

Emma Ormerod is a Senior Lecturer in Economic Geography and part of the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies (CURDS) at Newcastle University. Her research interests include sub-national governance and politics, and uneven urban and regional development.

Catherine Durose and Vivien Lowndes

Incomplete devolution: are there benefits as well as problems?

Key takeaways

1. City regional devolution can deepen place-based democracy and deliver for localities. But current policies don't cover all parts of England and have faced many changes in purpose, scale and scope. For decades, the devolution landscape has been littered with reforms and plans that have been shelved, abandoned or replaced. We usually think about this 'incompleteness' as evidence of failure.

2. In this brief, we argue that there are other ways to see 'incompleteness', which can help us deepen our understanding of potential futures for English city regional devolution. We argue that incompleteness may actually be an asset for local policymakers.

3. Incompleteness is a necessary part of the devolution landscape, enabling city regional actors to better recognise their own agency and influence, and design institutions that can adapt to changing circumstances. Incompleteness can also provide opportunities to open up devolution to more diverse voices, and better reflect local insights and lived experience. Flexible rather than fixed futures for city regional devolution may serve to deepen place-based democracy.

4. Thinking about incompleteness is particularly relevant now given the recent rapid churn in local economic development policy, and the uneven impacts of recent crises from the climate emergency to COVID-19 and the cost of living.

5. Incompleteness provides a lens for policymakers to make sense of the sub-national policy landscape and can help inform their activity. This could include working in non-traditional ways, such as co-production, which encourage openness to diverse voices and creative ideas, and embracing what works and is distinctive locally.

1. Introduction

The history of English city regional devolution is full of examples of plans and reforms that have gone awry, or were withdrawn or superseded before they were fully delivered. Abandoning and frequently replacing plans can undermine policymakers' ability to deliver outcomes. But are these dynamics always evidence of failure? Can we think differently about what we term 'incompleteness' in city regional devolution?

Our interest in 'incompleteness' arose from our recognition of the positives of doing things differently in different places, the importance of both reflecting specific local contexts and legacies, and the value in learning-by-doing and maintaining capacity to respond to changing contexts. We then sought to theorise this, and explore its policy implications.

In this brief, we argue that 'incompleteness' is a significant, inevitable and potentially valuable feature of the institutional landscape of city-regional devolution in England. Rather than a failure, city regional devolution can be understood as unfinished, in flux or open. This allows us to look at city regional devolution from perspectives other than that of central government, and recognises that city regional and local actors are often working in a policy environment not conducive to their needs or ambitions.

Thinking about 'incompleteness' as an inevitable feature of city regional devolution can be a way of recognising and embracing local expertise and lived experience, and designing institutions that are responsive to changing circumstances (Durose and Lowndes 2021). Flexible rather than fixed futures for city regional devolution may actually serve to deepen place-based democracy.

2. English city regional devolution over time

It is clear that, over time, institutions of city regional devolution in England have been initiated, shelved and sometimes re-emerged years later (see Table 1), alongside changes in governments, individual champions and external environments. Initiatives have been launched with great fanfare but often remain as lonely pilots, stumble to a standstill, or are abolished; as demonstrated in the recent announcement to wind down Local Economic Partnerships. Harrison (2012: 1255) pithily compares city regionalism with a fireworks display, noting that each initiative is launched "with a crescendo of noise, only to sparkle for a short time, before appearing to fizzle out and fall slowly back to earth". This is often seen as a negative outcome that indicates city regional devolution has been abandoned, stalled or thwarted (see Table 1 on page 3).

Yet, 'completing' English city regional devolution - rolling out plans, scaling up pilots - requires a policy environment often more conducive than the one that exists. One former local authority chief executive, for example, described the challenges of constructing a combined authority and negotiating a devolution agreement, as being conducted in a "space where hyperbole often clashes with the brutal reality of what needs to happen on the ground" (Reeves, 2016).

So how can we think differently about the challenges of negotiating the future of city regional devolution? How can we better understand this characteristic of 'incompleteness'? How can doing so reveal different futures for English city regional devolution? We argue that incompleteness in English city regional devolution can usefully be understood as 'unfinished', 'in flux' or 'open':

- City regional devolution can be understood as 'unfinished' because a reform is on its way to being completed. In this sense, incompleteness in city regional devolution is temporary.

- City regional devolution can be understood as 'in flux' because it is inevitably a struggle between different interests, which is necessarily contingent and subject to ongoing revision. In this sense, incompleteness in city regional devolution is inevitable.

- City regional devolution can be understood as 'open' as a means to allow it to be shaped by the changing circumstances, the local context and diverse voices. In this sense, incompleteness in city regional devolution is valuable.

- How can these different perspectives on incompleteness help us understand the current state of city regional devolution in England, and what do they mean for its future?

3. English city-regional devolution as 'unfinished'

Analysis of English central-local relations often stresses the long-standing imposition of standardising or centralising norms by central government on city regional and local institutions. Growing attention has been given to how the power and interests of central government may be advanced through city regional devolution. For example, the framing of city regional devolution and its fiscal conditioning has been seen as consolidating a focus on central government's priority of economic growth (Bailey and Wood, 2017). Specific governance arrangements, such as elected mayors, which disrupt local power bases have been a requirement, despite clear local disquiet (Lowndes and Lempriere, 2018).

Indeed, Sandford (2017) has compared the devolution deals to a contractual process, whereby central government sets the terms for 'outsourc[ing]' of particular schemes or projects to local government, and makes their response conditional upon specific arrangements for implementation, evaluation and future working. From this perspective, city regional devolution is a plan to be rolled out or scaled up in order to complete the aims of central government actors.

City regional actors may themselves aspire to completeness. This may either be to 'get the best' from each stage or negotiation or because they have a vision of what a devolution 'end state' should look like. Greater Manchester for instance, is often seen as playing a 'long-game' of promoting collaboration between individual local authorities across the city region as a pre-condition towards the realisation of a vision for the city region (Lowndes and Lempriere, 2018). City regional devolution can be seen as 'unfinished' because it is an ongoing process, in which further, more ambitious devolution deals are put in place over time.

4. English city regional devolution as 'in flux'

A parallel theme in recent analysis of English city regional devolution is that different local intentions can shape the implementation and impact of central reforms in diverse ways (Lowndes and

Table 1: Institutional incompleteness of city-regional devolution over time (adapted from Durose and Lowndes, 2021)

Period/ Government	Institutional incompleteness of city-regional devolution: key policy developments
1997 – 2004 Early New Labour	• Separate 'urban' and 'regional' policies initially pursued. • Urban policy focused on revitalization of core cities suffering deindustrialization and disadvantage, alongside wider policies of democratic renewal, citizenship and community involvement. • Constitutional reform agenda promised devolution at regional level, and led to creation of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in 1998, and restoration of an elected assembly for Greater London in 2000. • City-regional agenda emerging, promoted by Core Cities Group and New Local Government Network, and reflected in 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan. • Regional devolution for England abandoned, following rejection of an elected assembly for the North East in 2004 referendum.
2004 – 2010 Late New Labour	• City regional agenda advanced, with new growth plans, including the 2004 Northern Way, requiring local authorities to work together; and Sub-Regional Partnerships providing a co-ordinating role for the City Region Development Plans. • Limited institutional capacity at city regional level beyond City Development Companies (CDCs) and Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs). • RDAs remained but without elected members or community engagement. • City-regional agenda waned towards the end of New Labour period with departure of key advocates, such as Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott.
2010 – 2015 Coalition	• Abolished regional-level RDAs, creating space for city regional agenda. • Business-led Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) created at city regional level in 2011. • Slow recovery from 2008 financial crisis shifted focus to city regions to re-balance the economy regionally and as potential engines for economic growth. • City Deals introduced in 2012. • Northern Powerhouse and Midlands Engine initiatives. • Institutional capacity set up at city regional level via new Combined Authorities (CAs) - voluntary collaborations of local authorities, subsequently with a directly elected metro mayor as a condition of the devolution agreements from 2015. • Devolution deals devolved powers and resources from central government to CAs in some parts of England (with some upwards shift of local authority functions to CAs). • Bespoke arrangements within each deal, focusing on economic development but also devolution of health budgets in leading CA, Greater Manchester Combined Authority. • Powerful advocates for city regions in government, notably Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, and in the Conservative party, including Lord Heseltin
2015 – 2023 Conservative	• The 2016 Brexit referendum result prompted departure of Conservative devolution champions and the focus on Brexit reduced interest in city regional devolution. • Existing devolution deals completed with CAs, but with less variety. • Lack of drive to cover more of England, with only 10 deals by 2020 (Sandford, 2020). • Political re-alignment in the 2019 General Election re-focused attention on 'levelling up' across English city-regions, followed by a Levelling Up White Paper in 2022. • Pandemic secured public visibility and reputation of metro mayors in Northern England, particularly in fight for resources with Whitehall to compensate businesses affected by shut-downs and other mitigations. • Additional devolution deals to existing CAs were followed by 'trailblazer' deeper devolution deals for Greater Manchester and West Midlands in March 2023. • Announcement of the abolition of Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) by March 2024, alongside refocussing of policy on Investment Zones.

Lempriere 2018). For example, in contrast to previous attempts to introduce regional governance in England, city regional devolution 'deals' have been negotiated on a bespoke basis. Not all parts of the country are covered by the new institutional arrangements and, where combined authorities do exist, their governance, powers and responsibility vary significantly.

The uneven and conditional nature of reforms around city regional devolution suggests less of a master plan than an exercise in central-local negotiation. Indeed, the brevity and provisional tone of many of the 'devo deals', as compared for example to lengthy legislation to set up regional assemblies, may be seen as an attempt to balance competing political constituencies and keep open future possibilities for further devolution. This reflects the expectation by policymakers at central, city-regional and local levels to have to work with and around incompleteness.

Political realignment following the 2019 General Election prompted a new phase in this ongoing state of flux, as the Conservative government promised to 'level up' economic opportunity across the country, and Labour re-focused on devolution to capitalise on their mayoralties in key city regions. Central-local negotiation over city regional devolution has also been shaped by wider contextual uncertainty, associated with Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

5. English city regional devolution as 'open'

English city regional devolution may also be understood as being incomplete in a way that allows for greater responsiveness to local needs and aspirations. While some devolution deals have been criticised for excluding wider consultation (Lowndes and Lempriere 2018), cities like Sheffield and Southampton have used deliberative 'mini-publics' to debate the future of city-regional devolution, allowing citizens to bring to the table important and under-recognised issues relating local identities and democratic accountability (Prosser et al. 2017). At the same time, wider movements like the People's Powerhouse seek to ensure a greater diversity of voice and expertise in the devolution process across the North as a whole. These forms of participation, and more open institutional designs, can offer the means for wider inclusion and promote the legitimacy and effectiveness of city regional devolution. These examples are illustrative of the distinctive capacity of city regions and localities to generate institutional innovation. Indeed, in the UK, many

governance reforms have their origins at the urban level – for example, service outsourcing, public-private partnerships and co-production. Keeping city regional devolution 'open' can stimulate democratic engagement and creativity.

6. What does 'incompleteness' mean for how we understand city regional devolution?

We can see that within English city regional devolution different types of incompleteness are in play at the same time. For example, in adopting 'metro mayors' city regions such as Liverpool risked disrupting local power bases when the resources and responsibilities that might be devolved over time to that mayor were left 'in flux'. Yet in doing so, they may also be interpreted as working towards completing a devolution process that was perceived as 'unfinished'.

Once the principle of devolution had caught hold, city regions have been able to use this new central-local relationship to 'open' up the expansion of devolution in different and locally-specific ways. This illustrates how city regional policy makers can turn frictions into creative tensions, challenging existing power settlements and pursuing local priorities. The announcement of deeper 'trailblazer' devolution deals for Greater Manchester and the West Midlands in March 2023 (Institute for Government 2023) may be seen to reflect how the incompleteness of devolution can be turned to their advantage in a context of continued uncertainty.

The limits to the agency of city regional actors may be understood as representing a lack of power, authority or political will. But can also be seen as connoting effective resistance on the part of those actors who see change as challenging their interests. Yet, such incompleteness also opened up space for political contestation, where 'soft' power and influence become crucial. Indeed, following the announcement of 'trailblazer' deals, Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, asked for "guarantees from the Chancellor that the Liverpool City Region will be top of the list to next receive these additional powers" (Institute for Government 2023).

7. Why does this matter for policymakers?

This brief shows how reflecting on incompleteness can open up alternative ways of thinking about city regional devolution. It argues that incompleteness can be an asset rather than a problem for local policymakers.

Limited attention spans from central government, along with the appeal of the new have tended to shape a continuous and restless search for 'completeness' in city regional devolution. Our analysis has highlighted not only the inevitability of incompleteness in city regional devolution but also its potential advantages. The idea is not that plans or outcome specifications for city regional devolution should be abandoned but rather that pre-set or prescribed solutions are not necessarily the most effective or even efficient way to achieve them. A focus on incompleteness acknowledges not only the need to respond to local contexts in city regional devolution, but the value of actively creating and maintaining spaces of incompleteness. Such an approach can encourage new ways of approaching city regional devolution and using it as a means to deepen place-based democracy.

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Widnes town centre

About the authors

Catherine Durose is Professor of Public Policy and Co-Director of the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place at the University of Liverpool, where her work focuses on urban governance, public policy and co-production.

Vivien Lowndes is Professor Emerita of Public Policy at the University of Birmingham's Institute of Local Government Studies. She works on institutional design and urban governance.

Anne Green, Sue Jarvis, Abigail Taylor and Belinda Tyrrell

Influencing local employment support: reflections from two Mayoral Combined Authority Employment Innovation Pilots

Key takeaways

1. Analysis suggests there is no single model of integrating economic and social policy agendas within and across spatial scales to address worklessness, but it is possible to identify common features of a place-sensitive holistic approach.

2. Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs), with their reach across functional labour markets, are uniquely positioned to lead complex skills and employability programmes which straddle multiple policy areas and are rooted in place.

3. Evaluation findings from two MCA employment pilots demonstrate the value of moving beyond transactional relationships to steer collaborative partnerships and action at both national and local levels. It is important to build trust over time.

4. To build understanding across organisations regarding what has and has not worked, there is a need to improve data linking across policy domains and sharing of learning across organisations to create a shared body of knowledge for policy makers and practitioners.

5. In the face of entrenched worklessness in particular places it seems logical to suggest innovation in policy and approaches. However, measurement and evaluation of new initiatives have failed to keep up with the pace of change, in part due to shortcomings in capacity and resources (which, of course, vary between places).

1. Introduction

The UK's inter-regional inequalities – caused by complex interrelationships between the effects of economic geography, modern globalisation and governance (McCann, 2016) – is a long-standing policy challenge. Understanding the merits of place-based and place-blind interventions in tackling disadvantage is therefore a key consideration for policymakers (Nurse and Sykes, 2020). The Levelling Up White Paper, a flagship policy of Boris Johnson's government, offers the latest policy reset, with a decade-long policy agenda and 'complete system change' in how government works to address entrenched spatial disparities (HM Government, 2022).

This policy briefing provides insights from two employment pilots led by Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCA) which applied a place-based approach to tackle entrenched non-employment. Focusing on case studies from the West Midlands and the Liverpool City Region it explores how collaborative working across different tiers of government and between local authorities and public, private and voluntary agencies across a defined labour market is delivering locally sensitive solutions to worklessness in disadvantaged areas.

2. Entrenched non-employment in place

Spatial disparities in economic fortunes and labour market outcomes persist at various geographical scales, including across metropolitan areas in the European Union (Ehrlich and Overman, 2020), regions in the UK (Gardiner et al, 2013) and urban neighbourhoods. Analyses of mobility out of and into deprived neighbourhoods show that neighbourhoods have mixed trajectories, reflecting their different functional roles. While some people not in work move out of deprived neighbourhoods after securing employment and are replaced by others not in work, this does not appear to be the most important factor in the persistence of high rates of worklessness in deprived neighbourhoods (Barnes et al, 2012).

At the scale of local labour market areas, those with weak local economies suffered most in the 2008-2009 recession (Lee, 2014), and appear to also have been most adversely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic (Houston, 2020). Even at times of more favourable macroeconomic trends and a reduction in unemployment rates, labour market trends are not positive in some large urban areas and former industrial towns in Britain (Beatty and Fothergill, 2020). To some extent this reflects the types of jobs that are available locally in the immediate area or are accessible through commuting. In analyses of what works to address worklessness the difficulties of integrating economic and social policy agendas within and across spatial scales are highlighted (North et al, 2009). There is no single successful model but common features can be identified. These include the importance of outreach, holistic approaches, individualisation, continuing support, flexibility, individuals' motivation and aspirations, partnership working and the role of employers (Green and Hasluck, 2009).

3. Case study 1: Connecting Communities

Connecting Communities was an innovative place-based employment support pilot, delivered by nine different providers in nine neighbourhoods, commissioned by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) as part of its devolution deal with central government. Emphasising intensive, personalised, and locally-sensitive support, the programme sought to build social networks to foster positive behavioural and attitudinal changes towards work, increase employment and work with local businesses to bolster the recruitment and progression of disadvantaged individuals.

Adopting a geographical saturation model, it located personalised, relational, place-sensitive support services where people live, to facilitate engagement and to increase the opportunity for informal encounters that could lead to positive new connections, as well as aiding local partnership working. A key innovative feature was the inclusion of those in work looking to progress into higher paid employment alongside out-of-work participants.

Connecting Communities engaged over 4,000 participants across nine neighbourhoods, supporting over 3,250 participants with at least three meaningful interventions (meeting 82% of the target). Programme participants were diverse. There was a differentiated payment model for people out of work for two years or more, people out of work between one and two years, people out of work for less than one year, and people in work and seeking to progress. The likelihood of finding work was significantly higher amongst those unemployed for shorter durations. Participants were also more likely to find work if they did not have a health condition, completed an action to identify possible jobs that matched skills, or accessed support for financial and digital inclusion. There was strong qualitative evidence for increases in participant self-esteem, feelings of control and awareness of labour market opportunities.

Connecting Communities continued to deliver, with adaptations, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The shift from face-to-face to virtual support prompted by the pandemic was beneficial for participants in employment and those closer to employment who were confident in their use of digital services, but was challenging for those lacking digital skills and access to IT. The pandemic reduced opportunities for physical co-location and serendipitous encounters. It also changed the nature of labour demand, such that some participants had to reassess their options.

4. Case study 2: Households into Work

Launched in February 2018, Households into Work is a unique and innovative employment support programme. Jointly funded by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), its aim was not only to help people find work but to help people get to a point where thinking of employment as a realistic option was a major step forward. The programme was voluntary and there were no penalties for non-compliance. Referrals could be made by any organisation working with an individual who might benefit from a place on the programme or by the individuals themselves.

Delivered by a team of Employment Advocates who worked across the six Liverpool City Region local authorities, the programme was delivered on an outreach basis with a target number for participation of 1,600 individuals in 800 households. The advocates provided participants with 1:1 support, helping to tackle and resolve issues which were preventing them from seeking employment and for which they had limited or no access to relevant people or services. The issues faced by participants are complex and varied including debt and finance, housing, mental health illness, domestic violence, addiction(s), isolation and disaffection. Until such issues are tackled, finding and sustaining employment is a very unlikely and unrealistic expectation.

People could remain on the programme for up to 12 months during which the advocate would help the individual identify, prioritise and tackle the issues which were preventing them from seeking and sustaining employment. Unlike similar employment programmes, other members of the household were encouraged to join so that issues could be addressed collectively as well as individually. The premise was that adopting a whole household approach to address potentially complex needs was more likely to lead to a lasting solution compared to alternative options which tend to work with the individual in isolation. Advocates also had access to flexible funding to purchase goods or services that could help the household progress towards the labour market.

Households into Work was able to mobilise a new delivery option to help its clients deal with the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic within a matter of weeks. Not having the constraints of a centralised delivery structure ensured a swift and innovative flexing of the delivery offer. This proved to be a crucial and timely intervention for some of the households. Acting at pace to reshape service provision would have been more difficult to achieve if the programme had been part of a centralised and more restrictive contracting model.

5. Policy implications

Central-local relationships

The recent devolution of powers, responsibilities and funding to metro mayors in England has begun to shape multi-level governance (national, city regional and local) and place-based policy across organisational divides. Whilst the UK's over centralised governance is not necessarily a problem, "institutional reforms which either remove local monopolies or which remove top-down central government restrictions on local initiatives and which allow coalitions of local actors and institutions to undertake development

activities building on local knowledge, are key to the modern place-based approach" (McCann, 2016). MCAs with their reach across functional labour markets are uniquely positioned to lead complex skills and employability programmes which straddle multiple policy areas and are rooted in place.

The WMCA and LCRCA pilots adopted a place-sensitive holistic approach which enabled partners to work at a strategic level, as well as test new ways of supporting a diverse range of participants to progress towards employment. This required vertical coordination through the DWP and MCA to ensure national policy intent was responsive to city region need/opportunity and strong horizontal collaborations between public service practitioners to deliver interventions at the local level. Incremental policy shifts and operational changes starting with the 2008 city region multi area agreements, the 2012 city deals and the 2015 mayoral devolution deals laid the foundations for greater local influence over employment support. The MCAs benefitted from an 'institutional layering' effect (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010) enabling them to move beyond transactional relationships to steer collaborative partnerships and action at both national and local levels towards shared outcomes.

Trust

Trust is a powerful asset in steering collaborative effort. Levels of trust can determine how stakeholders interact with an organisation in the future, because the way stakeholders view an organisation's motivations and behaviour influences their current and future decisions and actions towards it.

When considering what drives trust between organisations and stakeholders, PWC (2015) break it down into the following elements:

- Competence – Transparency, Reliability, Delivery;
- Experience – Expertise;
- Responsiveness and Values – Understanding needs, Communitarian, Vision; and
- Social – the extent to which the organisation cares about its impact on society as a whole.

Looking across the two case studies we can see these elements of trust apply, from the initial willingness of DWP to support innovation by devolving resources, collaboration between partners of different types and scale, and the relationships between practitioners and programme participants which were key to creating improved outcomes for their client group (Tyrrell, 2020).

The evaluation of the LCRCA pilot highlights the asset based and partnership approach as being hallmarks

of the programme. Households into Work taps into the formidable resources which already exist within the local community to offer a whole system approach that puts improved outcomes for participants at the centre instead of the concerns of specific organisations.

Built over time, across policy areas and upon multiple layers of transactions, trust shapes both behaviour and actions towards organisations (Crossley et al, 2013), influencing the allocation of resources and their ability to innovate to achieve sustainable success.

Combining interventions in place

There is evidence of policy silos at a local level and that the current employment support system is "fragmented, complex and difficult to navigate for individuals, employers, employment support providers and policymakers" (Phillips, 2022). Nonetheless, "the issues and challenges facing local communities are often complex, and require a holistic approach to be resolved" (OECD, n.d.). The WMCA and LCRCA examples show how, rather than responding to challenges through a single project, policy agendas can be brought together at a local level to respond more efficiently and effectively. The WMCA has reorganised its directorates to link learning, skills, economies and health. In Liverpool City Region, learning from the Households into Work Programme has been used to develop the Economies of Health programme.

To build understanding across organisations regarding what has and has not worked, there is need to improve data linking across policy domains and sharing of learning across organisations. This can help to create a shared body of knowledge. It is important to develop systems for practitioners to share knowledge. Strengthening links between central and local government in terms of data availability, access and sharing is likely to be key here. Secondments of staff between organisations can facilitate practical learning, language and shared learning of processes. Social networks can act as connectors to information, intelligence and opportunities and should not be overlooked.

6. Limits to innovation

In the face of entrenched non-employment in particular places it is logical to suggest that innovation in policy approaches is appropriate. A decade ago, a report calling for innovation and experimentation in the jobs market (Casebourne and Coleman, 2012) identified three main policy approaches to tackling worklessness. First are policies to increase the aggregate demand for labour – through monetary and fiscal policies. Secondly, there

are policies to improve the supply of labour – through adjustments to the tax and benefits system to make work pay and by increasing or improving the supply of labour through training. The third approach focuses on improving labour market efficiency by better matching of demand and supply.

Much of the existing employment support and skills provision available at local level in the UK is commissioned and procured nationally by a variety of government departments and agencies. It is complemented by local provision from local authorities and the third sector. This, coupled with the increasing use of competitive funding processes with an emphasis on innovation, has led to a fragmented and complex picture of multiple support initiatives, which is difficult for local stakeholders to navigate.

There have been important and welcome innovations in employment support policies in recent years. These include a new focus on in-work progression rather than merely employment entry and retention, enhanced involvement of service users in planning and development of policies, and a greater role for combined mayoral authorities in co-ordinating service provision. Yet measurement and evaluation of new initiatives have failed to keep up with the pace of change, partly due to shortcomings in capacity and resources (which vary between places). An undue stress on innovation can be counterproductive since it may lead to a lack of emphasis on the tried and tested fundamentals of employment support policy. Continuity is important in tackling entrenched problems.

Both case studies highlighted in this briefing illustrate how devolution offers bespoke opportunities for collaboration across multiple organisations, practitioners, participants and place to address challenges of entrenched worklessness. These examples of collaborative activity provide valuable insights for the design of policies to support place-based approaches to employment support.

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About the authors

Anne Green is a Professor of Regional Economic Development at City-REDI/ WMREDI at the University of Birmingham. She is an experienced applied researcher working on topics including spatial dimensions of socio-demographic and economic change, employment and skills, regional and local labour markets, migration, employment support and area regeneration policy evaluation.

Sue Jarvis is Co-Director at the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place. Sue has a professional background in local government policy making and senior leadership experience of delivering public services, including complex programmes where activities are undertaken by partners across multiple agencies. She has undertaken key roles in the development of a succession of Liverpool City Region plans, leading high impact projects focused on skills, employment and economic development, including devolution of the Adult Education budget.

Abigail Taylor is a Research Fellow at City-REDI/WMREDI at the University of Birmingham, who is experienced in conducting qualitative research with both policy makers and disadvantaged individuals. Abigail works on topics including employment support policy, regional and local labour markets and skills.

Belinda Tyrrell is a Research Associate at the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place. Belinda is an experienced practitioner and qualitative researcher. Her areas of research interest include employment support, employability and skills, community participation and digital inclusion.

About the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place

The Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place is an interdisciplinary public policy research institute which brings together academic expertise from across the University of Liverpool with policy-makers and practitioners to support the development of sustainable and inclusive cities and city regions.

For more information on the work carried out by the Heseltine Institute with local partners in Liverpool City Region, please visit **www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute/**

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