



Place over politics

What polling tells us about how successful devolution has been to date

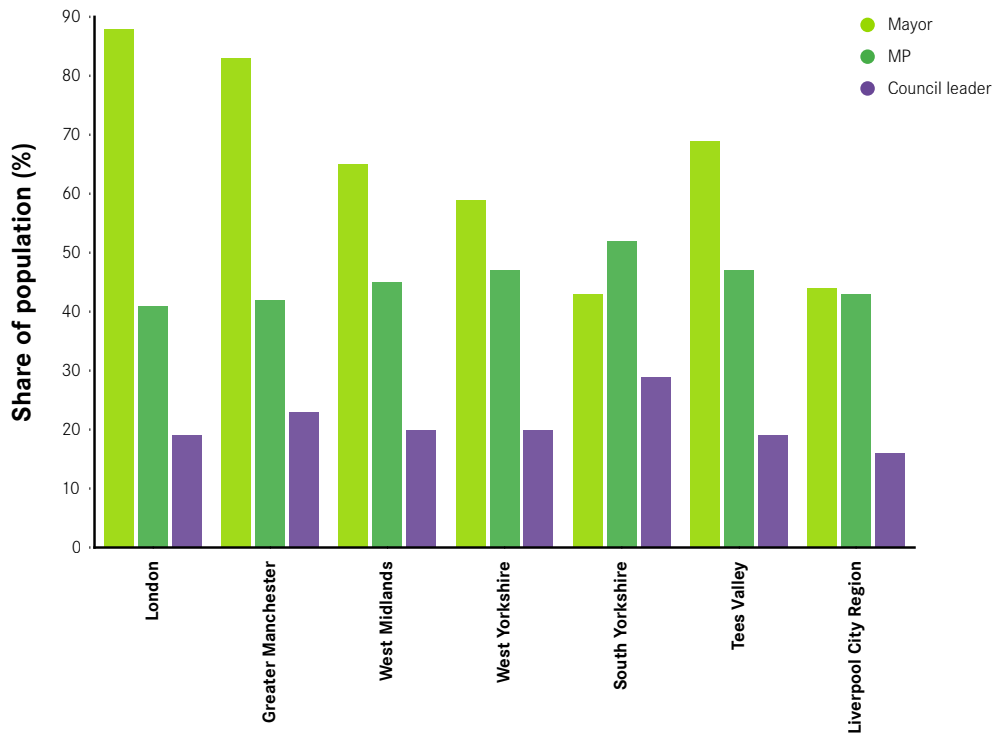
March 2024

In just over 5 weeks' time people in 10 different areas will go to the polls to vote for a mayor. In anticipation of this Centre for Cities has polled people across the largest mayoral areas to find out their knowledge of the mayoral institution and what this tells us about how successful devolution has been to date. This is what it found.

Mayors are much more recognisable than other prominent local politicians

More than three quarters of people polled could name their mayor. Sadiq Khan was most recognisable, with 88 per cent of people naming him. Andy Burnham was close behind at 83 per cent (see Figure 1).

While there is variation across the other mayors, respondents in every single area were more likely to name check the mayor than their local council leader (on average 20 per cent of people could do the latter). Being more visible and accountable was one of the benefits put forward for mayoral-led devolution. These results suggest that this benefit has come to pass.

Figure 1: Mayors are more recognisable than other local politicians

Source: Focaldata polling for Centre for Cities

Questions:

- Who is the current Mayor of [your mayoral area]?
- Who is the current MP in your area?
- Who is the current leader of your local council?

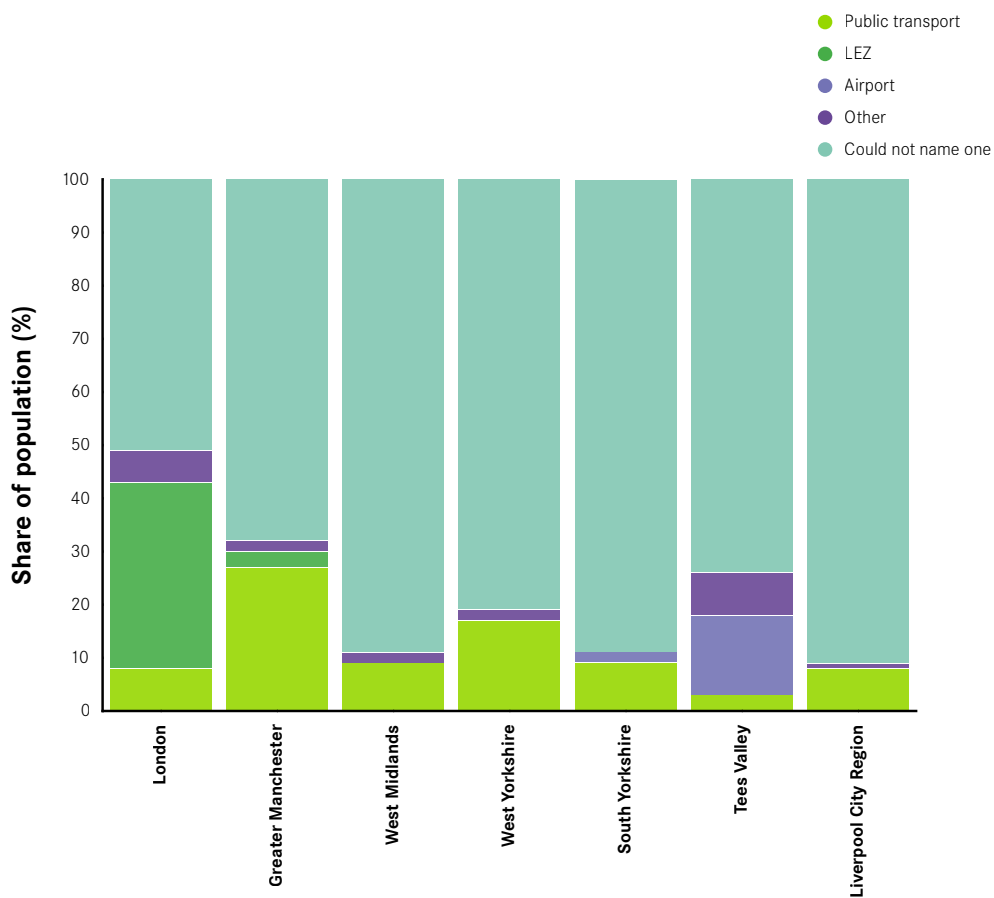
One of the reasons for the lower recognition in the Liverpool City Region may be because of a degree of confusion between the different levels of leadership. Unlike the other mayoral areas, until recently Liverpool had a directly-elected local authority mayor. In the responses given both the previous holders of this post and the Lord Mayor of Liverpool were given as responses.

To account for this Centre for Cities ran a further poll asking people to name the 'metro mayor of Liverpool City Region' rather than just the 'mayor'. Recognition increased, with 54 per cent of residents identifying their Metro Mayor, up from 43 per cent, bringing it more into line with other city regions. The other names continued to be given as answers though, suggesting more needs to be done to differentiate the different levels of governance.

Transport policies have most cut through

Perhaps unsurprisingly many fewer people could name specific policies that the mayors had put in place. But when they could name a policy, it was most likely to be a transport-related one. In London ULEZ was the most named policy – 35 per cent of respondents did so, by far the most named policy in the survey (see Figure 2). The launch of the Bee Network in Greater Manchester was cited many times, as were £2 bus fare caps in Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. Meanwhile taking control of the airport was by far Ben Houchen’s most recognised policy in Tees Valley.

Figure 2: Transport-related policies were the most identifiable policies in mayoralities



Source: Focalddata polling for Centre for Cities

Question:

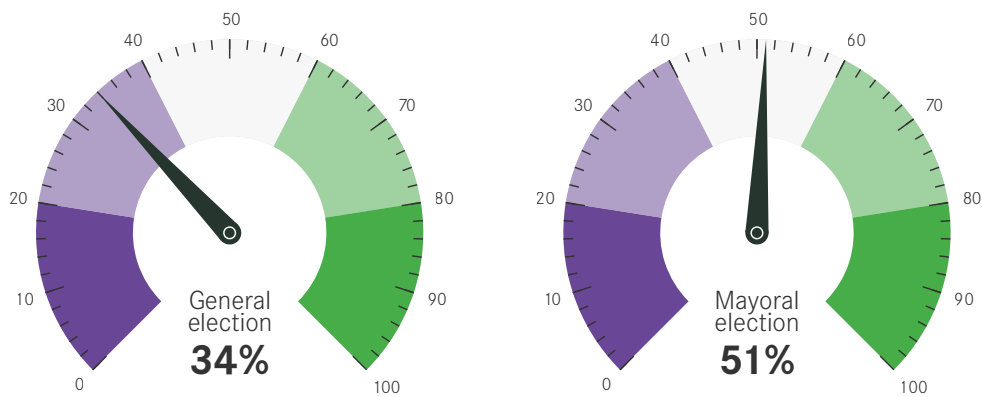
- Can you name one of the policies the current Mayor has introduced?

Candidate quality is relatively more important than the colour of the rosette

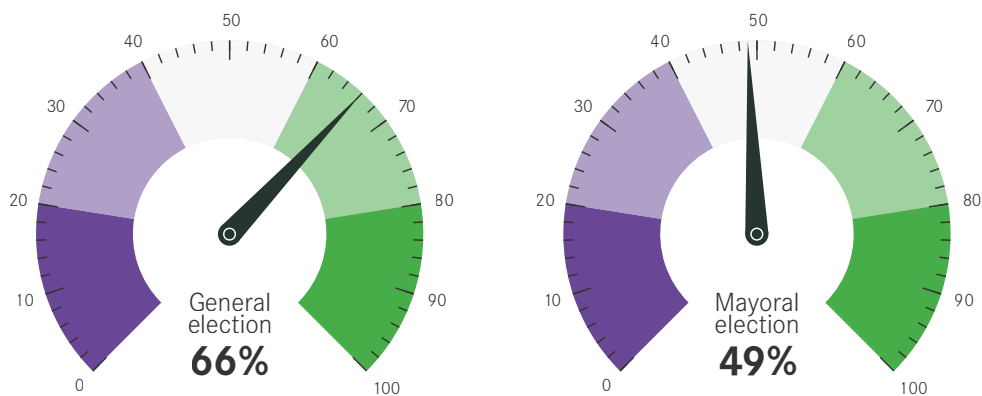
Place trumps politics, with people more likely to vote for the candidate than their party in a mayoral election than the general election. Figure 3 shows that half of people say they would vote for the candidate over party in the mayoral election compared to 34 per cent in the general election.

Figure 3: People say they are more likely to vote for the candidate than the party in a mayoral election than the general election

Candidate



Political party



Source: Focaldata polling for Centre for Cities

Questions:

- In the Mayoral election, what is more important in determining who you vote for?
- In the General Election, what is more important in determining who you vote for?

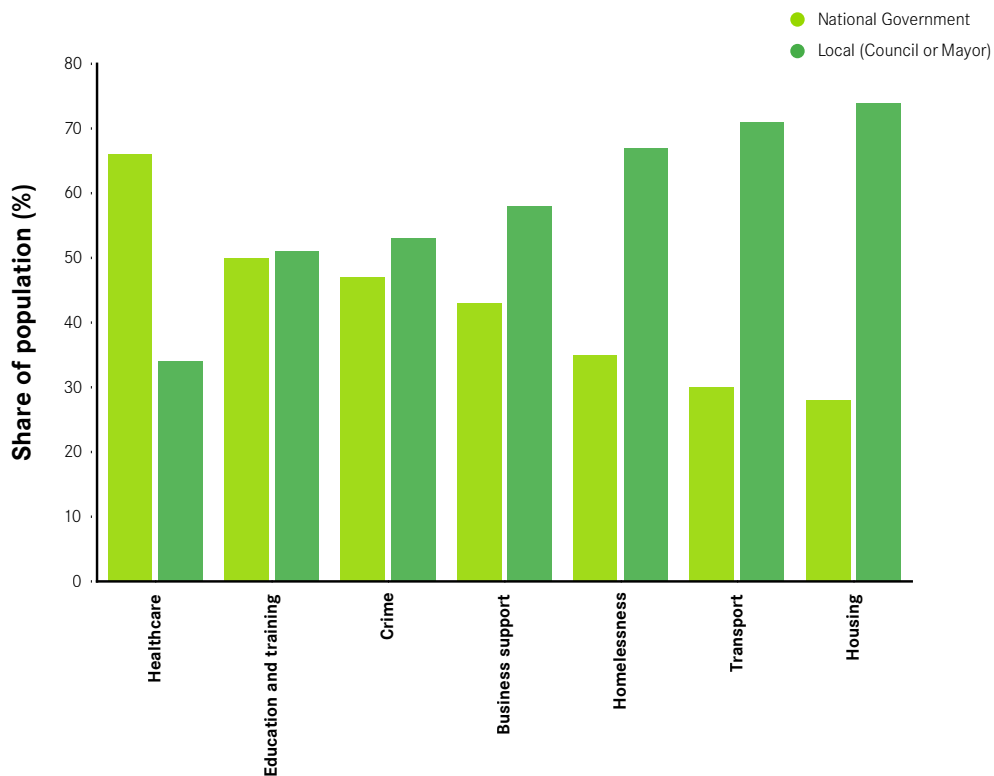
This again is a victory for devolution. One of the anticipated benefits was that it would create a position with enough power to not be totally swayed by national politics (in the way local council elections are). Andy Burnham has [also often](#)

argued that the mayor is much more about place than about party affiliation, with mayors trying to improve their place irrespective of their political affiliations. These findings back this up.

There is much support for policy power to be held at the local level

When asked at what level policy powers should be held at, for all big policy areas bar healthcare the majority of people across the mayoral areas believed they should be held at the local level (see Figure 4), and this was consistent within each mayoral area. In every case though it was the local council that respondents felt should hold these powers, rather than the mayoralty. Transport was the area where most people were likely to say it should be held by the mayor, with 28 per cent saying so, but 43 per cent saying the council should have the powers. London was the only place where this wasn't the case: 42 per cent said the mayor should control transport, compared to 28 per cent saying the boroughs should do so.

Figure 4: People want to see policy powers held at the local level



Source: Focldata polling for Centre for Cities

Question

- Who do you think is better placed to make decisions relating to the following issues in your area?

This poses a challenge for the mayors. Not all powers should go to them by default, but where there is a rationale for decisions to be taken at the city-region wide level rather than the local authority level they are better placed to do so. Transport and housing are two examples. The good news then is that the mayors don't have to convince the public of the virtues of devolution. But they have got work to do to convince them about what policies they should have control over.

There is very little awareness of the mayoralty in areas that will vote for the first time

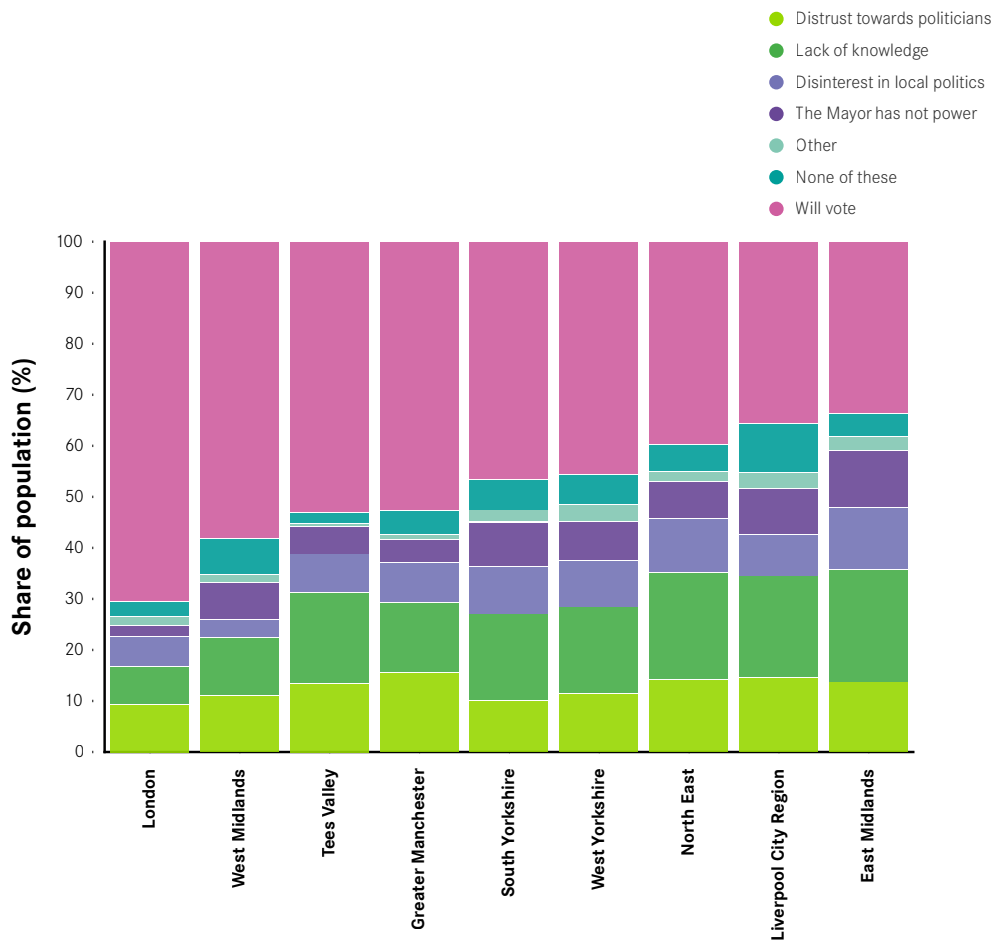
In contrast to the high recognition of existing mayors, the ability of people to name check candidates in the East Midlands and North East mayoral areas, who will vote for a mayor for the first time on 2 May, and their awareness that the election will happen, was low. In the East Midlands, only 10 per cent of people could name a candidate, and in the North East it was just 4 per cent.

In some ways this is unsurprising given they are new positions. And it is further evidence of the visibility of existing mayors, who have been able to increase awareness. Some of this will likely follow for these areas too as the institution is established. But both areas are about to get a mayor with control over a number of policies that will affect their lives. If people know about the election and choose not to vote then that is up to them. But not voting because they weren't aware of it isn't a good place to be.

And so this finding is a warning. It shows that there is work to be done by the candidates themselves and the local media in both areas to raise awareness of the importance of the mayor and the election to come.

Lack of knowledge is much less of a barrier in a number of other areas (see Figure 5). Noting that intent to vote isn't the same thing as actually doing so, almost three quarters of people in London say they will vote in May's mayoral election (and they were most likely to know the election will be in May). Two thirds say they will do so in Tees Valley, West Midlands and Greater Manchester. In places with lower intentions, lack of knowledge is the main reason offered as to why they won't. This means that campaigns to boost awareness shouldn't just be limited to the East Midlands and the North East.

Figure 5: Lack of knowledge is a main reason as to why people say they either don't know or won't vote in May's mayoral election



Source: Focaldata polling for Centre for Cities

Questions

- Will you vote in the next Mayoral election?
- What are the biggest factors that will influence your decision not to vote in the Mayoral election?

Conclusions

One of the key reasons for introducing a metro mayor over other forms of local leadership was that it would create a more visible and identifiable politician both to the electorate but also to national and international audiences. These polling results suggest that this has been the case, especially in London, Greater Manchester, Tees Valley and the West Midlands. This should give national politicians and policy makers confidence that they have made the right choice in opting for the metro mayoral model for these areas.

The results also raise concerns that there is very little awareness of the creation of the mayoral position and the forthcoming election in the East Midlands and

the North East, the two areas that will be voting for the position for the first time. With five weeks to go this emphasises the need to raise awareness, and in doing so the local media and the candidates themselves should not just look to discuss the candidates, but the value and power of the institution too to raise turnout and boost the mandate of whoever is the eventual winner.

Methodology

Focaldata polled a representative sample (based on age and gender) of 3,455 people eligible to vote in upcoming mayoral elections in Greater London (628), Greater Manchester (501), West Midlands (452), West Yorkshire (412), South Yorkshire (255), Tees Valley (155) and Liverpool City Region (287), and in the areas covered by the two new mayoral combined authorities in the East Midlands (365) and the North-East (390).

To get all mayoral area averages the data was further weighted to represent the relative size of the population in each mayoral area.

The survey was in the field between 26 February 2024 and 15 March 2024.

Polling data

Mayoral area	Total sample	Those giving the correct answer to: Who is the current Mayor of [Mayoral area]?	Those giving the correct answer to: Who is the current MP in your area?	Those giving the correct answer to: Who is the current leader of your local council?
London	628	552	257	117
Greater Manchester	501	415	209	117
West Midlands	452	292	202	89
West Yorkshire	412	244	193	83
South Yorkshire	255	110	132	75
Tees Valley	155	108	73	30
Liverpool City Region	287	127	125	46
East Midlands	365	38	169	78
North East	390	14	144	52

Those who could name a policy in response to: Can you name one of the policies the current Mayor has introduced?

Mayoral area	Public transport	LEZ	Airport	Other
London	48	222	0	38
Greater Manchester	133	16	0	11
West Midlands	39	2	0	8
West Yorkshire	72	1	0	7
South Yorkshire	23	0	6	1
Tees Valley	5	0	23	13
Liverpool City Region	24	1	0	2

In the Mayoral election, what is more important in determining who you vote for?

In the General Election, what is more important in determining who you vote for?

Mayoral area	Candidate	Party	Candidate	Party
London	328	300	236	392
Greater Manchester	263	238	165	336
West Midlands	241	211	170	282
West Yorkshire	212	200	118	294
South Yorkshire	119	136	75	180
Tees Valley	99	56	73	82
Liverpool City Region	139	148	91	196
East Midlands	168	197	102	263
North East	201	189	142	248

Who do you think is better placed to make decisions relating to the following issues in your area?

Homelessness

Mayoral area	Mayor	Council	Nat Govt	Other
London	110	285	221	13
Greater Manchester	98	282	112	9
West Midlands	61	259	120	12
West Yorkshire	38	238	115	21
South Yorkshire	32	139	69	15
Tees Valley	21	92	37	6
Liverpool City Region	29	175	71	11
East Midlands	34	217	98	16
North East	27	227	112	22

Transport

Mayoral area	Mayor	Council	Nat Govt	Other
London	261	161	187	19
Greater Manchester	180	217	93	11
West Midlands	112	221	109	10
West Yorkshire	98	185	112	16
South Yorkshire	57	134	58	6
Tees Valley	40	84	27	4
Liverpool City Region	60	151	67	10
East Midlands	27	228	99	11
North East	58	215	95	21

Crime

Mayoral area	Mayor	Council	Nat Govt	Other
London	143	168	293	23
Greater Manchester	106	198	182	15
West Midlands	82	151	191	27
West Yorkshire	53	152	183	24
South Yorkshire	38	86	116	14
Tees Valley	38	58	53	6
Liverpool City Region	42	118	107	20
East Midlands	40	155	148	22
North East	49	172	141	27

Housing

Mayoral area	Mayor	Council	Nat Govt	Other
London	88	348	179	13
Greater Manchester	70	338	83	9
West Midlands	59	292	85	15
West Yorkshire	31	271	94	16
South Yorkshire	23	168	57	7
Tees Valley	21	99	30	4
Liverpool City Region	23	187	69	7
East Midlands	22	255	80	8
North East	26	262	82	20

Business support

Mayoral area	Mayor	Council	Nat Govt	Other
London	114	219	271	24
Greater Manchester	104	218	158	20
West Midlands	115	166	152	20
West Yorkshire	65	169	151	27
South Yorkshire	44	114	86	11
Tees Valley	48	57	47	4
Liverpool City Region	49	117	104	17
East Midlands	42	184	121	18
North East	50	183	124	32

Education and training

Mayoral area	Mayor	Council	Nat Govt	Other
London	77	222	313	15
Greater Manchester	67	212	206	17
West Midlands	53	190	189	20
West Yorkshire	34	177	182	18
South Yorkshire	23	98	127	8
Tees Valley	29	54	65	8
Liverpool City Region	24	132	122	9
East Midlands	22	167	163	12
North East	42	163	164	20

Healthcare

Mayoral area	Mayor	Council	Nat Govt	Other
London	61	133	412	21
Greater Manchester	57	151	278	14
West Midlands	43	110	278	20
West Yorkshire	34	99	260	20
South Yorkshire	20	60	163	12
Tees Valley	25	40	82	8
Liverpool City Region	24	96	158	8
East Midlands	15	94	241	15
North East	23	127	215	24

Will you vote in the next mayoral election?

Mayoral area	Yes	No
London	460	168
Greater Manchester	309	192
West Midlands	283	169
West Yorkshire	220	192
South Yorkshire	139	116
Tees Valley	99	56
Liverpool City Region	127	160
East Midlands	165	200
North East	188	202

What are the biggest factors that will influence your decision not to vote in the Mayoral election?

Mayoral area	Distrust towards politicians	Lack of knowledge	Disinterest in local politics	The Mayor has not power	Other	None of these
London	61	49	38	14	11	19
Greater Manchester	91	80	46	26	6	27
West Midlands	54	55	17	35	8	34
West Yorkshire	55	82	44	37	16	28
South Yorkshire	30	51	28	26	7	18
Tees Valley	25	33	14	10	1	4
Liverpool City Region	52	71	29	32	11	34
East Midlands	67	108	59	55	13	22
North East	67	99	50	34	9	25

Contact

Paul Swinney, Director of Policy and Research

p.swinney@centreforcities.org | 020 7803 4305

Audrey-Frédérique Lavoie, Researcher

a.lavoie@centreforcities.org | 020 7803 4305

About Centre for Cities

Our mission is to help the UK's largest cities and towns realise their economic potential.

We produce rigorous, data-driven research and policy ideas to help cities, large towns and Government address the challenges and opportunities they face – from boosting productivity and wages to preparing for Brexit and the changing world of work.

We also work closely with urban leaders, Whitehall and business to ensure our work is relevant, accessible and of practical use to cities, large towns and policy makers.

For more information, please visit www.centreforcities.org/about

Partnerships

Centre for Cities is always keen to work in partnership with like-minded organisations who share our commitment to helping cities to thrive, and supporting policy makers to achieve that aim.

As a registered charity (no. 1119841) we rely on external support to deliver our programme of quality research and events.

To find out more please visit: www.centreforcities.org/about/partnerships

© Centre for Cities 2024

Centre for Cities Second Floor, 9 Holyrood Street, London SE1 2EL

www.centreforcities.org

Centre for Cities is a registered charity (No 1119841) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England (No 6215397)