



What can a mayor do for your city?

Submission from Centre for Cities, December 2011

Since the Government made its commitment to introduce elected mayors in 12 of England's largest cities through the Localism Bill, Centre for Cities has been an active contributor to the debate on mayors. In our joint report with Institute for Government published in June, ([*Big Shot or Long Shot? How elected mayors can help drive economic growth in England's cities*](#)) the Centre recommended that directly elected mayors have the potential to make a difference to cities' economic performance because they offer enhanced visibility; opportunities to exercise leadership; make strategic choices; and drive action through local authorities and their partners.

We argued that a mayor could use both formal and informal powers with the aim of overcoming four key governance challenges to economic policy making. A mayor:

- Has the potential to help city authorities to be decisive on issues of strategic economic importance.
- Can act as a representative to local and central government.
- Could bring coherence to the actions of the public sector and collaborate with local authorities, businesses and other players in the wider local economy.
- Would be well placed to help cities navigate the complicated web of relationships with the new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Integrated Transport Authorities and others.

To be impactful and effective in this way, mayors must be afforded the powers to make strategic decisions for growth. Centre for Cities welcomes the Communities and Local Government consultation on mayoral powers. Based on our recent research, we recommend that the Government should consider the following points when shaping policy on mayoral powers through secondary legislation:

1. What powers do mayors need?

Centre for Cities has argued that the mayoral model, as currently proposed, should go further. Cities should have the choice to hold referenda, either for a metro mayor, covering the geography of the real economy, or for a local authority mayor. Ultimately we would like to see the introduction of metro mayors with the best aspects of the London mayoral model made available to all of England's largest cities. This would allow those cities where there is the political appetite for it to introduce a metro mayor.

Metro mayors should be given powers to:

- Develop a strategic spatial plan for their area similar to the London Plan, which local planning authorities must have regard to when developing or updating their Local Development Frameworks (LDFs).
 - Take decisions on planning applications of strategic significance whilst all other decisions would be taken by the planning committee of the relevant authority.
 - Co-chair the LEP.
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- Chair the Integrated Transport Authority and appoint the board.
- Play an active role in negotiating new powers and devolutions from Whitehall, as enabled by the Localism Act and the General Power of Competence.

Metro mayors could also be in a better position to offer the authority and credibility needed to develop proposals for pooling business rate revenues at the LEP level, whereby each local authority would contribute part of their business rates yield into a central pot. As Co-Chair of the LEP, the mayor could be directly involved in deciding how this money should be spent.

Enabling metro mayors to assume these powers, particularly with regards to LEPs, would reduce the complexity of the economic development landscape. This is likely to allow local government to offer more effective support in facilitating private sector jobs growth.

2. Local authority mayors: what powers would give them the strongest potential to be effective?

If the Government proceeds with the mayoral model as currently proposed at the local authority level, legislation should enable mayors to:

- Ensure the Core Strategy of the LDF is a broad strategic spatial plan for their area, which also looks beyond administrative boundaries, similar to the London Plan. The Local Plan as a statutory plan would hold weight, setting the direction for all other plans and provide a basis for joint working with neighbouring local authorities on matters of strategic importance.
- The mayor should take decisions relating to policy and planning applications for developments of strategic significance which have an impact on economic growth and job creation. The planning committee of the authority would determine all other planning applications.
- Chair the Integrated Transport Authority. This would afford the mayor greater strategic influence over transport policy, both within their local authority and across the natural economic area.
- Co-chair the LEP. This would enable the mayor to affect decisions of strategic importance within the remit of the LEP like Enterprise Zones.

In this event, all mayors should receive the same powers at the same time. This will allow the transition to be rolled out over a shorter time period, avoiding lengthy negotiations over which powers should be afforded to each mayor, and allow mayors to get on with the job in hand. The onus will then be on the mayor to use these powers effectively to support economic growth. Finally, the Government should set up a mechanism to scrutinise mayors to check on their progress.

Key recommendations for government

Mayors have potential to help support economic growth in cities, provided they are given the right powers to do so. These powers should afford mayors the strategic oversight and political clout needed to make the tough decisions for growth. Centre for Cities advocates that the package of powers outlined in our submission document will give mayors the chance to have a positive influence on their local economies.

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