



Seven lessons for the new metro mayors

December 2016

Introduction

In May 2017, a number of cities will be electing ‘metro mayors’ for the first time. While their policy portfolios vary as to each deal arranged, the new metro mayors will have powers over transport, housing, skills training, business support and strategic planning.

A key challenge for the first metro mayor of each city-region will be balancing on the one hand achieving visible and tangible results, and on the other building the capacity, experience and the reach of the institution and office itself.

This briefing is based on interviews held in April 2016 with senior staff from the first 16 years of the Greater London Authority (GLA) and sets out their advice on what makes a successful mayoral team. Similar to London’s mayor, the 2017 intake of metro mayors will form a new strategic level of governance working with constituent local authorities that make up their city region. The new metro mayors will take hold of many of the same levers of power that the mayor of London enjoys. They will also face many of the same challenges in delivering change and services across their cities, while shaping the capacity and institution itself.

While many of the original lessons for London’s mayor remain relevant, some are not. Most importantly, as inaugural metro mayors, the lessons of how to build a team are more important than they would be for the fifth term Mayor of London. There are also differences in the mayoral model itself - for example the new metro mayors will have a more limited suite of direct powers (with the arguable exception of Manchester). The new metro mayors’ executive powers will also be weaker than in London due to the different leadership model. The metro mayor model empowers the leaders of the local authorities that make up each city region to hold the Mayor to account - scrutinising and ratifying the mayor’s budget - rather than an assembly of directly elected representatives, the model used in London. The new metro mayors will also not have the freedom to hire multiple deputy mayors, and are restricted by legislation to a single political advisor.

This briefing therefore adapts the lessons from the London conversations for the new set of metro mayors, and adds those from the early institution building days of London’s City Hall. These lessons fall into two broad themes: firstly, making the most of what will be the formative first term; and secondly, delivering a vision for the city.

The First Term: demonstrating visible and tangible results from the start

1. Have a vision to guide your mayoral term and your big policy priorities – and communicate it

Former members of the GLA's senior team made clear that the priority for the first metro mayor should be setting a vision for their city region, which articulates the ambition and expectations that they have. The metro mayor needs to both have and be able to communicate a clear sense of their own mission and purpose, as well as where they see the city region going. This is not just important in getting elected and informing the public about what the new metro mayor can do, it also helps establish an organising framework to inform and guide priorities, policies and staff appointments.

Focusing on a few key strategic aims that are important to the metro mayor matters. As the first leader of the city, competing demands and external events will bring emergent challenges and pressures on the metro mayor's time and capacity. Setting a limited number of strategic long term priorities – the vision for the city – will therefore help signal what the metro mayor sees as the most pressing challenges, alongside responding to external shocks.

2. Set out clear achievable strategic priorities to deliver on your vision

When elected, the metro mayor will face the challenge of translating their overarching vision into policies. The clearer each metro mayor can be regarding these priorities from the beginning, the easier it will be to build appropriate capacity, inform staff, and design a structure that delivers on their vision.

History shows that, although the nature of these policy priorities will be shaped by changing economic and political conditions, they will also require decisive action from the new metro mayor. The metro mayor will have to choose how to expend a limited source of capacity and political capital on his or her top priorities.

3. Find the changes that can be enacted early on

The new metro mayors will need to communicate effectively and engage the electorate across the city region. They should do this not only for the benefit of their political career, but because the role itself is new and not universally popular, and critics will be swift to judge early results. With this in mind, a few targeted 'quick wins' can help build trust, and show what the metro mayor is able to do for the city region.

The best 'quick wins' in these circumstances are high profile and valuable to citizens. They can help provide a narrative as to what the Mayor will do for them and the city. For example, in London, Mayor Khan's hopper fare (allowing a second free bus journey inside an hour window from the first) or Mayor Livingstone's pedestrianisation of Trafalgar Square, were both visible 'quick wins' that set the tone for what type of mayor they each wanted to be.

Delivering a clear vision: setting and achieving policy priorities.

4. Seek to exploit both the formal and informal powers of the Mayoralty to deliver on your priorities

Outside the remit of formal powers the metro mayors will hold on taking office, they can also draw on their significant electoral mandate to exert wider influence and deliver change. For example, in London Mayor Livingstone used his mayoral mandate to challenge the Government's Tube Public Private Partnership and to implement the (at the time contentious) congestion charge. Neither of these were mandated in the original GLA Act, nor supported by national politicians.

The power of the metro mayor's office will be considerable as the voice of the most high profile politician in the city. The metro mayor's term will be primarily judged on delivering the services for which they are responsible and meeting the challenges that emerge for the city. However, the metro mayor can use the informal powers

of their office (including convening powers and the profile created by their electoral mandate) to focus on priorities that fit in their vision for the city region, even if they are not within their official remit.

5. Be pragmatic in dealing with central government, and build broad alliances to help lobby for change

The metro mayors will need to forge a constructive relationship with central government whichever their political party. According to each deal, the combined authority will receive most of its funding from central government and major projects will inevitably depend upon support from Whitehall to be delivered.

Building this relationship will not always be straightforward, even when the mayor and the government of the day belong to the same political party, as evidenced in London during periods of both the Livingstone and Johnson administrations. It is therefore important for the metro mayor to build broad cross-sector and cross-party alliances to strengthen their position when dealing with the government. This will be crucial not only to working effectively and utilising the informal powers of the mayoral mandate but also in arguing for more powers.

For example Manchester had already agreed its fourth devolution deal by the 2016 Budget (including criminal justice powers and more control over the adult education budget) showing the evolving nature of these deals. The next step in cities like Birmingham is already anticipated to be fiscal devolution and trialling retention of local tax and revenues to go with existing borrowing powers. A strong and competent track record of delivery and network of alliances will help to argue this case.

6. Establish a strong working relationship with the constituent local authorities

Each metro mayor shares responsibilities in areas like housing, planning and transport with colleagues across their city's local authorities. Although the metro mayor will enjoy a significantly larger mandate and higher profile, and has responsibility for devising and delivering a strategic plan for their city, most strategic mayoral priorities need to be implemented by local authorities at the local level. This relationship is further complicated by the ability of local leaders to challenge the metro mayor through the cabinet system.

Combined authorities will prove useful in this. However, they have been set up to manage relationships between multiple authorities rather than to deliver an individual's vision, therefore the model will require further adaptation.

Although there is no cabinet of leaders, the challenges are similar in London. Despite relations occasionally being strained, both the Livingstone and Johnson administrations acknowledged that constructive relationships with the London boroughs were vital to delivering change on the ground. Partnerships between the mayoralty and the boroughs were critical to the development and delivery of major projects such as Crossrail and the Olympics, as well as other more focused mayoral priorities.

It will be vital for the new metro mayors to establish strong working relationships with local authorities and develop a keen political understanding of when to use the powers of their office to drive through change, and when to adopt a more consensual approach to making change happen.

7. Forge and strengthen international links and presence

The metro mayors have the profile and the opportunity to sell their city regions to investors and talent, and build links with fellow mayors internationally. For example the Mayor of London has made the "London is open" campaign a key part of his early months in office and is current chair of the C40 climate group. The former Mayor Johnson boosted the international profile of Tech City from New York to Tel Aviv.

Identifying how best to do this for each network or industry, and the potential returns of investment associated, will be important to avoid either too little or too much resource being expended on international relationships and profile building.

Conclusions

Uniquely, the first metro mayors in English city regions will be in a position to demonstrate why the role itself matters and will, in part, form the institution itself. Through achieving tangible early results, as well as demonstrating progress against a longer term vision, the new metro mayors can show voters and Whitehall decision makers what they can already do, and what they could do if trusted with additional powers and responsibilities.

Metro mayors will face different challenges to existing local authority leaders. They will be elected directly and held to account personally for delivering their manifesto commitments; they will need to build the capacity and institutions required to run a city; make local, national and international alliances; and be the voice for and leader of the city. This piece, drawing on the insights of those who have worked at the very top within London's City Hall over the last 16 years, provides a guide as to making that first impression count and delivering on their priorities in the years ahead.

They show that to succeed in tackling the economic, social and environmental issues facing each city, the new metro mayors must set the tone for delivery right from the start, setting out a vision backed with clear strategic and deliverable goals. They then need to achieve them, on time and on budget. To do this, each metro mayor needs a clear sense of what they want to achieve, the team and capacity they need to help them deliver, and the external working relationships that will be key to achieving change.

The new metro mayors will take office at a challenging time for the country, and will be expected to deliver improvements for their residents and businesses. The reflections contained in this report will help the new metro mayors to hit the ground running on day one.

Contact

Ed Clarke, Analyst, Centre for Cities

e.clarke@centreforcities.org / 0207 803 4308

© Centre for Cities 2016

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

www.centreforcities.org

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