

## What is happening to true local democracy?

Yesterday - Govt English **Devolution Statement** made at **1pm on 16 December 2024**

- [Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)
- [English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](#)
  - *“we must rewire England and end the hoarding in Whitehall by devolving power and money from central government to those with **skin in the game.**”*
- Devolution powers p86 (extract attached)
  - Mayoral **precept powers** for *“funding and investment”* and *“Ability to raise a Mayoral Community Infrastructure **Levy** to fund strategic infrastructure (once the Spatial Development Strategy is in place)”*
  - Ability to make Mayoral Development Orders
  - Ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations - Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)
  - duty to produce a Spatial Development Strategy
  - Devolution of wider grant funding to support regeneration and housing deliver
  - Ability to set the strategic direction of any future programme to support affordable housing provision in their area
  - Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England
  - Support to establish a public sector land commission
  - Heat network zoning coordination *role*
    - *“Zoning coordinators within Strategic Authorities will be able to **designate areas as heat network zones**, enabling the most appropriate level of local government to assume the role of heat network zoning coordinator and play a key role in the delivery of heat decarbonisation.”*
    - [\(p93\) NSC Local Plan DP6](#) - Net Zero Construction *“... getting design right from the outset is much more cost effective than needing to retrofit later... Renewable energy credits will be purchased in order to achieve the net zero energy balance.*
    - [\(Page 98\) NSC Local Plan Policy DP7](#) Large scale renewable and low carbon renewable energy *“Proposals for energy generation from renewable and low carbon sources including wind turbines, solar photovoltaic arrays, biomass and hydropower (marine, river and tidal) schemes will be supported subject to no unacceptable impact on: (a variety of caveats including) ...Infrastructure assets including power lines, roads, rail and aircraft safety.”* NO FOOD?



- North Somerset Council Report to the Executive Date of Meeting: **17th September 2024** Subject of Report: Devolution North Somerset Council's response to Government's Invitation around Devolution [Committee Report NSC](#)
- 10. *"Options Considered We have the option to respond declining the government's invitation for exploratory conversations, which is felt unviable given North Somerset's financial context and ambition. Alternative geographies have been considered, however the **West of England is North Somerset's primary Functional Economic Area and is therefore being explored as our preferred option. We do not rule out alternative options** in the event this becomes undeliverable. The benefits of a mayoral versus non mayoral model will be explored through dialogue with government. Author: Jo Walker, Chief Executive jo.walker@n-somerset.gov.uk*
- *Appendix 1 Devolution Deal EOI North Somerset Preferred geography (upper-tier local authorities in the area) West of England **Initial preference** on mayoral / non-mayoral devolution Mayoral, subject to further detail regarding the Devolution Bill outlining the merits and opportunities a mayoral deal would bring over and above a non-mayoral deal*

No response from my two District Cllrs Porter and Solomon re: food security, Local Plan and WECS

- Email 04 December 2023 regarding food security
- A year later 03 December 2024 regarding food security & WECA (no acknowledgement despite request)

Letter to resident 26 November in response to public address questions to NSC Exec 17 Sept and chasing a response via Weston Town Council **25 November from Cllr Mike Bell:**

- Extract, "**North Somerset Council agreed to submit an expression of interest in joining the existing West of England Mayoral Combined Authority.** At this stage, none of the information on powers, funding or alternatives are known as the government has not set out its intentions.
- *Once this has happened and we have a clearer understanding of the landscape and Ministerial intentions, North Somerset Council will consult the community and stakeholders on any options.*
- *None of the existing combined authorities have been subject to a referendum and I do not anticipate a plebiscite being undertaken in North Somerset ahead of any decision. It is within the powers of the UK government to establish the pattern and remit of local government, including combined authorities and I expect them to do that in their forthcoming White Paper."*

BBC article [Angela Rayner promises mayor for every region of England - BBC News](#)

- *"Under the proposals, the government also wants to **merge areas** where there are currently two tiers of local authority - smaller district and larger county councils - in a bid to streamline services..."*

- *Rayner said the government would work with local leaders to deliver its plans but where they are unable to agree on a way forward, **ministers would get the power in law [i.e. don't already have it?]** to "knock heads together" and create larger authorities.*
- *giving **local groups the right to buy** under-threat community assets such as youth clubs, pubs, libraries and sports facilities **[Don't they already have it?]***
- *Ministers see streamlining local government as a way to enable the **creation of more powerful local mayors**, in an attempt to unblock infrastructure and attract greater investment.*
- *Elected mayors would then **oversee areas representing two or more councils**, and be handed **more powers over things such as planning decisions** and public transport.*
- ***Dozens of district councils could be abolished** as a result – prompting some to claim it would deprive people of genuinely localised decision-making.*
- *Labour argues the overhaul will **make local government simpler and produce savings** by making the delivery of services more efficient **[proven savings research?]***
- *The plans are **opposed by the District Councils' Network**, an umbrella group for such councils, which says there is "little evidence" from past reorganisations that taxpayers' money will be saved.*
- *The **Conservatives** said Rayner's announcement was part of a plan to "**strip councils of their powers**" and to impose reorganisation from Westminster "**without local consent**".*
- *The **Liberal Democrats** said council budgets were "on the brink" and without properly investing in social care **more vital services would disappear**.*
- *However, the proposals have been **welcomed by the County Councils Network**, which says its members "now recognise the need to embrace the benefits" of devolution **in the face of "significant financial challenges"**.*
- *Cllr Louise Gittins, chair of the **Local Government Association**, said "**genuine devolution of powers and resources can play a huge role in promoting inclusive economic growth, creating jobs, and improving public services**".*
- *She said her members were "open to change" but "**remain clear that local government reorganisation should be a matter for councils and local areas to decide**".*

Bearing in mind that WECA appears to be a private sector LLP of 3 bodies that take the profit but not the risks or debts that may result from any poor decisions (these financial debts would end up on local authorities)?

- WECA is a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) – where “Each member pays tax on their share of the profits, as in an ‘ordinary’ business partnership, but they are **not personally liable for any debts** the business cannot pay.” See Companies House for [West of England Combined Authority membership](#).

NSC against devolution in 2016

BBC [2016 NSC vote against West 'Metro Mayor'](#) plan during government £1bn devolution plan.

- " Mr Ashton also said any future "resources or powers" would be **controlled autonomously by the proposed mayor** leaving the local authorities "with no say in it whatsoever".
- "We have worked hard with our fellow West of England partners to get the best available deal for the area, but too much remains that we are not prepared to support". He said the **money offered would have to be borrowed**, with around £400m spent on interest rates. ([17JUN16](#))

[Dept for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Letter 05MAR24](#)

- "**Ministers are concerned as to the West of England Combined Authority's capacity to comply with its Best Value Duty**" and issued a Notice "... following inconsistent action against concerns highlighted". The concerns we've identified include: "

Wiltshire / BANES recent concerns

- 20 November 2024 - [BANES Council leader has claimed WECA is "in turmoil" - BBC News](#) The leader of Bath and North East Somerset Council (BANES) Kevin Guy says the **leadership of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) is "in turmoil"**.
- Wiltshire and BANES leaders clash over housing targets - 11th October "Cllr Richard Clewer has strongly criticised the call from the leader of BANES for a regional cross boundary approach, which would allow **Bath's housing targets to go beyond local authority boundaries.**" [Wiltshire and BANES leaders clash over housing targets | Wiltshire Times](#)