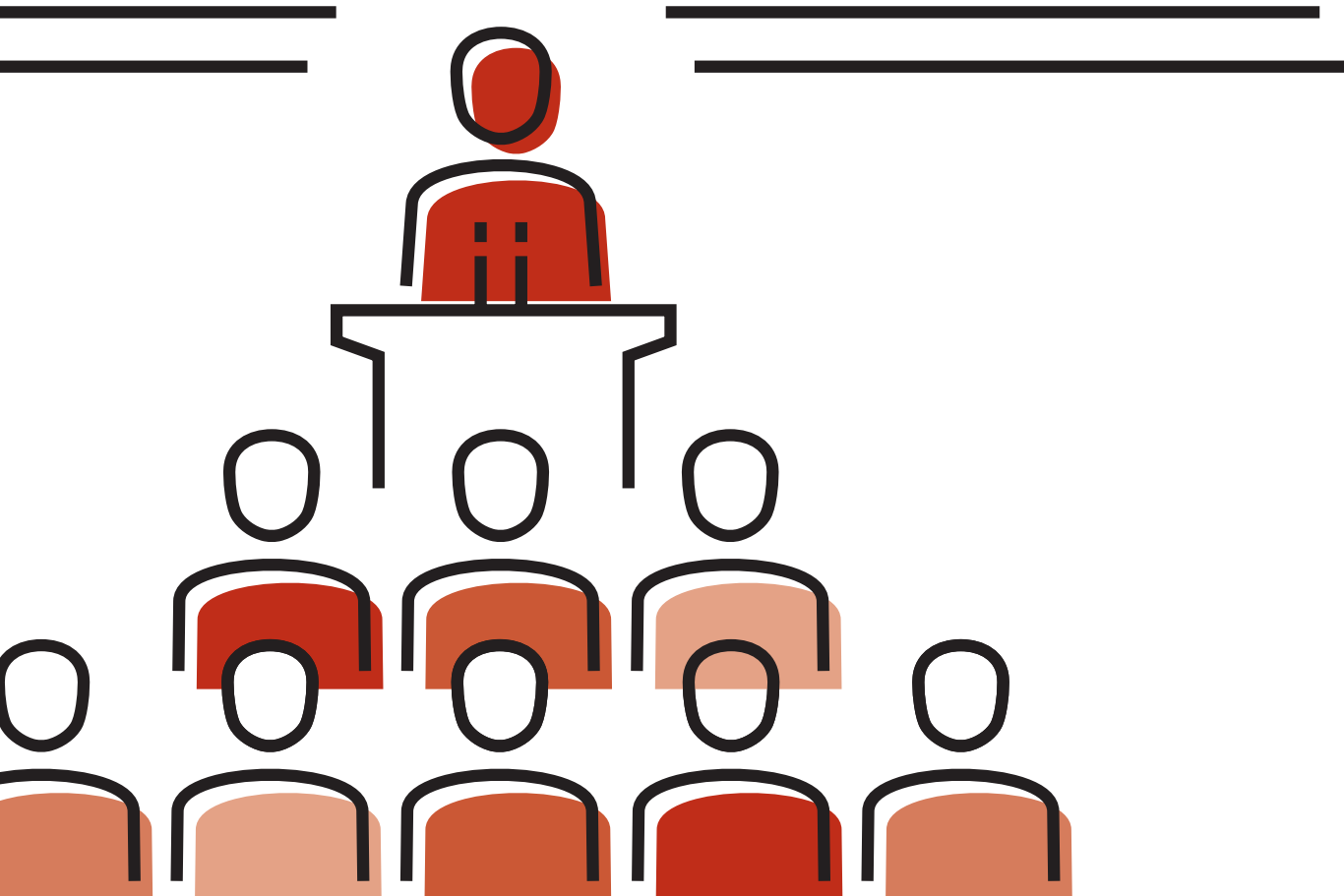
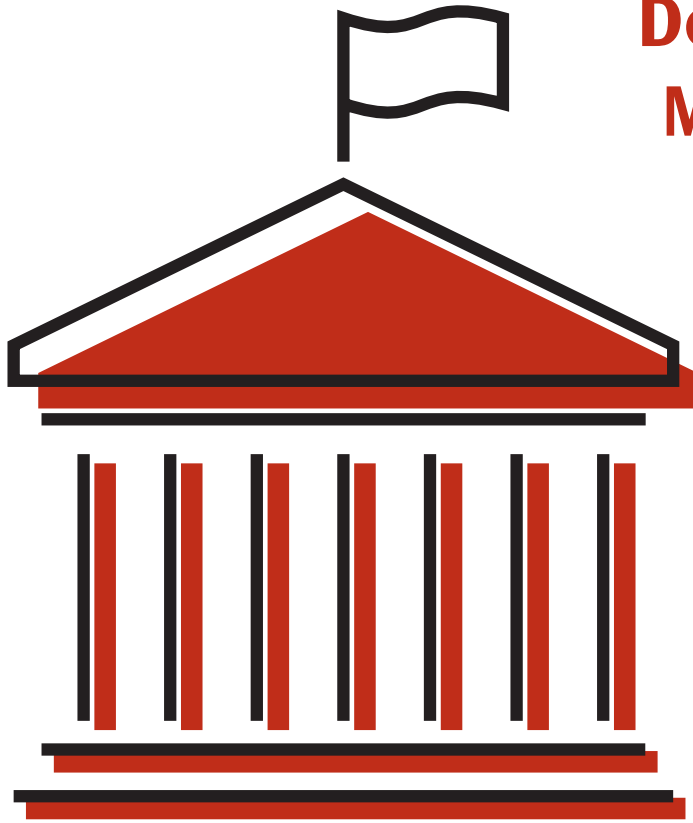


# Devolution and Good Mayoral Governance

White Paper



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*“When we talk about “good” Mayors, what we really mean is “effective” Mayors. As with any elected politician, success is measured by an ability to get things done.”*

Ed Hammond, Interim Chief Executive, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

# Introduction

Directly-Elected Mayors (DEMs) have been a feature of executive governance in England for more than two decades but their work has been comparatively little-studied (with the possible exception of Bristol's two mayoralities). Despite Government's focus on them as a key component of the devolution framework, outside of combined authorities they are not especially common.

Now, however, the Government's plans on devolution places them centre-stage both for local councils and combined authorities. The publication of the first iteration of the Government's English Devolution Accountability Framework in March 2023 provides an excellent opportunity to understand what it is that makes mayoral governance effective – because an understanding of where and how “effectiveness” arises makes it easier to understand outcomes, and to manage key accountabilities.

This paper is intended to explore the subject of directly elected Mayors in English (DEMs) local government, and as a feature of English combined authorities. Questions we explore are as follows:

- What makes for a “good” Mayor?
- Are the accountability systems and checks and balances we have in place for DEMs fit for purpose and proportionate?

This paper introduces the Mayoral system in both local and combined authorities, before exploring five components about what make for “good” and “successful” Mayors:

- Mayoral character;
- Mayoral convening power;
- Mayoral ability to develop a “sense of place”;
- Accountability systems around Mayors;
- The ability to deliver, and demonstrate, better outcomes?

Are these the right “metrics” against which to measure the strength of the Mayoral governance model? What other mechanisms exist to explore and judge Mayoral effectiveness, and how can lessons be drawn that would prove useful to areas establishing Mayoralities for the first time?

**Ed Hammond**  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Centre for Governance And Scrutiny

**Scott Dorling**  
Partner  
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## Interviews

CfGS has undertaken interviews with individuals who have a stake in mayoral governance, to obtain their valuable insights into the questions we are seeking to answer. We interviewed the following individuals:

- Mayor Peter Taylor, Watford Borough Council
- Mayor Jamie Driscoll, North of Tyne
- Kevin Lee, Director of Mayor Andy Burnham's Office
- Professor Diana Stirbu, Professor of Public Policy and Governance, London Metropolitan University.
- Akash Paun, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Government
- Eleanor Law, Policy Advisor, Levelling Up and Devolution at the Local Government Association
- Nicola Ward, Statutory Scrutiny Officer at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.
- Andrew Carter, Chief Executive, Centre for Cities
- Nick Bowes, Chief Executive, Centre for London

Matters were discussed with participants on the understanding that while comments would be used in the formulation of this paper, those comments would not be attributed. The comments, conclusions and analysis present in this document should therefore not be taken as representing the views of these participants, individually or collectively.

We have also undertaken significant documentary research to support this work, looking at Mayoral operations in a range of English authorities (including press coverage, constitutional information, and day to day management issues), and comparative information relating to Mayoral governance in other jurisdictions. We have had regard to the small, but in-depth, corpus of academic research on this subject as well.



# The Mayoral system: background

Civic and ceremonial Mayors (who did, by ancient practice, hold some formal powers) have been a feature of English local governance for centuries, but directly-elected, decision-making Mayors are a comparatively recent phenomenon.

There are three forms of elected Mayor in England:

- The Mayor of London, whose powers were set out in the Greater London Authority Act 1999, following a referendum on the introduction of a Mayor in 1998;
- Directly-elected Mayors (DEMs) in English local authorities, provided for in the Local Government Act 2000 and subsequent legislation (in particular the Localism Act 2011);
- Metro Mayors for English combined authorities, provided for in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016.

A fourth form of elected Mayor is that provided for in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill 2022-23 – a directly-elected Leader for county combined authorities, who can be referred to as a Mayor or one of a number of other adjacent titles.

The above arrangements mean that, in some areas, there may be more than one Mayor in a single geographical area – this is the case for places like Liverpool, Salford, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Croydon. These areas will also have ceremonial Mayors, further complicating matters for the uninitiated.

This paper does not deal distinctly with the role and powers of the Mayor of London, although research and learning derived from this legislatively unique form of Mayorality has informed our own research.

Hitherto, all Mayors have been elected using the supplementary vote (SV) electoral system, which allows voters to make a ranked choice. Government proposes to move all Mayoral elections to first past the post (FPTP). It remains to be seen how this will change people's perceptions of the credibility and legitimacy of the postholder, much of which rests on their large, direct personal electoral mandate.

## Local authority Mayors

The Local Government Act 2000 introduced provisions for local authorities to adopt two forms of governance incorporating a directly-elected Mayor (DEM) – the “Mayor and Cabinet” model and the “Mayor and council manager” model (the latter of which was formally removed in 2011 – it was only ever operated by Stoke on Trent Council, who abandoned its use in 2008).

Government set out what it saw as the benefits of the Mayoral model both in the White Paper “Modern local government: in touch with the people” (1998) and by setting out the “key features” of it, and other, models, informed by research conducted by the Institute for Local Government at the University of Birmingham (INLOGOV).

Inevitably, however, DEM governance was introduced “sight unseen” – it was a novelty in the English constitutional framework and early adopters had to feel their way in designing and operating it appropriately. Government's supporting material, including guidance, perhaps downplayed the importance of behaviour, character and relationships in making Mayoral governance “work”. The focus was on designing the mechanics that would provide for balanced powers, using the scrutiny function as the main source of checks and balances.

This, and other material from the time (including some academic literature and other research) suggested that Mayoral governance would automatically be more streamlined, accountable, democratic and transparent.

There were a handful of councils who introduced DEM governance in the early 00s. One of the more high profile was in Hartlepool. Here, Stuart Drummond stood for the role as a novelty candidate in the persona of “H’Angus the Monkey”, the mascot of the local football club – to the surprise of many he won and has since been regarded as one of the more successful DEMs, being re-elected twice, only stepping down when the council adopted to abolish the Mayoral system a decade later. This highlights – as we will explore below – the centrality of character, charisma and personality to success in Mayoral elections (and in being able to secure success as a Mayor).

Successive Governments have been keen to see English local authorities adopt DEMs – local government itself has proven more equivocal, as have local areas. The introduction of DEM governance has required the holding of referendums, many of which have resulted in the rejection of the model by electors. This was most notably the case in the 2011 Mayoral referendums in the English core cities. Here, Government felt that DEM governance provided a mechanism to drive forward ownership and direction on growth, as part of its wider drive towards economic growth<sup>1</sup>. Other than in Bristol, all of these referendums resulted in a rejection of the Mayoral model (and in Bristol, a referendum held in 2022 will see the council reverted in 2024 to the committee system).

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### Mayors and improvement

Mayors have been seen both as barriers, and enablers, of local government improvement.

- Hackney: strong Mayoral leadership was seen as instrumental in moving the council from a position of significant financial weakness in the early 00s;
- Liverpool: former Mayor Joe Anderson was implicated in failures in property and development which led to the Council being placed under central Government intervention;
- Croydon: the establishment of Mayoral governance is seen by some as providing accountability and leadership as the council recovers from its financial crisis.



<sup>1</sup> As made more explicit in Lord Heseltine’s Government-commissioned “No stone unturned in pursuit of growth”, published later the same year.

## Combined authority Mayors

The establishment of Mayoral governance at combined authority level was seen as central to the Government's devolution agenda in 2015-17. Government's current (March 2023) plans with regard to the devolution framework mean that the greatest "freedoms" are being made available only to those willing to adopt this governance model.

The Mayor of London, while not a template for combined authority Mayors, was seen by Government as a useful model to demonstrate the positive outcomes of devolution. London's Mayoralty was able to demonstrate significant successes – notably relating to the local operational control of transport. London's Mayoralty is also subject to the oversight of the Assembly, a form of check and balance which has not been replicated. The English Devolution Accountability Framework (see below) sets out Government's plans to review this model's effectiveness.

In other areas devolution deals with Mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) have taken a common form – an initial agreement followed by numerous iterations to increase and enhance powers. Different areas are at different stages on this "journey", and the Government's devolution framework has been cited as a way to provide both more transparency in what this journey looks like, and clarity on the destination. Certainly, the English Devolution Accountability Framework (EDAF), published March 2023, has begun to make expectations clearer about what the quid pro quo will be for areas seeking to do deals with Government – a clear roadmap towards greater local power and autonomy, tied to greater expectations around local accountability, with Mayoral governance at its heart.

Governance arrangements for MCAs consist of a bespoke Order for each area (using systems established in the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016). MCAs are bodies made up of constituent authorities – councils in the local area each of which send a member to the MCA's Board, which makes decisions together with the Mayor. MCAs can also have non-constituent members. Generally speaking, MCAs were not enthusiastic adopters of Mayoral governance – in most areas constituent authorities accepted the necessity grudgingly as the price for enhanced powers.

The original design of MCAs was arguably weakened, in governance terms, by two things:

- The fact that MCAs were "built" on older institutions – generally, integrated transport authorities – therefore inheriting some of their governance shortcomings, and that the assumption was made by Government and others that they would be very small, lean organisations, which suggests a very different model for Mayoral leadership;
- Attempts made, through governance schemes agreed by MCAs before Mayoral elections, to tacitly limit the power of the Mayor. In some areas, constituent authorities were keen to make Mayoral governance more predictable; some wanted to see if governance systems could be designed to restrain Mayoral power.

The Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill (at time of writing progressing through Parliament) provides for similar powers to be held by Mayors of county combined authorities (CCAs) – from the limited amount of information on the face of the Bill it appears that the powers and operations of CCAs will be largely similar, although areas will be permitted to select a title other than "Mayor".

## Mayors in other jurisdictions

### France

In France, for many observers, the legal status and powers of mayors remain exceptional among the Western democracies<sup>2</sup>. It can be said that the way in which the municipal council is organised in France has been devised to ensure the endurance of the mayor's power. Mayors in France are the chair of the municipal council who oversees and makes decisions on municipal affairs. They have significant powers, from local taxes, transportation, schools and tourism<sup>3</sup>. As well as this their mandate includes the following:

- Defining and carrying out local economic development projects.
- Managing public services in the community, including transport, housing, sports facilities, hygiene, health and social welfare.
- Approving building work applications.
- Approving purchases and sales relating to community property or activities.

The mayor is also a representative of the state (agent de l'état) within their locality. In this capacity, the mayor is considered a legal officer of the state and an officer of the judicial police.

Mainland France consists of 36,569 municipalities (communes) in 22 regions. Additionally, there are 212 communes in French overseas territories. Council elections are held every six years and the first task of a newly constituted council is to elect a mayor (whose term will then last for six years) Despite stark differences in populations between regions, each French commune has a mayor and a municipal council (conseil municipal) who jointly manage the commune from the mairie (city hall), they hold the same powers irrespective of the size of the commune (with Paris being the only exception; here the city police are overseen by central government, not the mayor of Paris)<sup>4</sup>.

There have been some recent changes to local councils in France, which led to the transfer of power to larger 'communauté de communes' (CDC) as well as weakened grant cuts, and the loss of income from taxe d'habitation<sup>5</sup>. However, they still exercise a significant amount of power comparatively to English Metro Mayors.

### USA

In the USA, almost all large US cities have strong mayoral systems. Mayors in the USA are directly elected and they take different forms dependent on the locality. There are, broadly speaking, two forms of mayoral governance: the mayor-council system and the commission system.

In the mayor-council governance system, the structure is head of the executive branch, presiding over council meetings, appointing chiefs of departments, perhaps with the council's approval, and is often the budgetary officer of the city. He can veto ordinances passed by the legislative branch, the council. They can also veto ordinances passed by the legislative branch, the council. Within this, there are the 'weak and strong' models, the 'strong' mayor can:

- Appoint and remove heads of city departments officials, which are elected.
- Prepare the budget
- Have the power to veto.

2 Kerrouche, E. (2005). The Powerful French Mayor: Myth and Reality. In: Berg, R., Rao, N. (eds) Transforming Local Political Leadership. Palgrave Macmillan, London. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230501331\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230501331_11)

3 [The role of the mayor and mairie in France - Complete France](#)

4 [City Mayors: French Mayors](#)

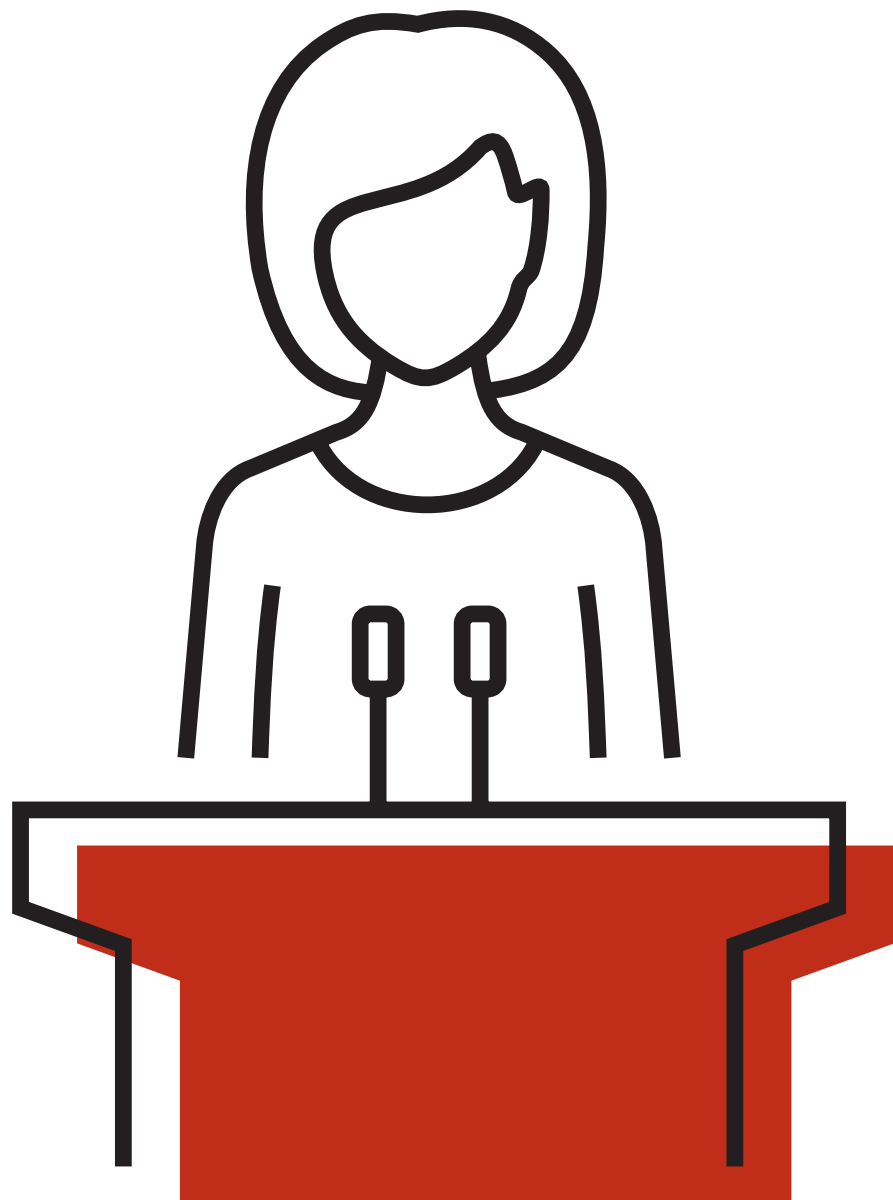
5 [Mayors quit as many have responsibility but no power \(connexionfrance.com\)](#)



The 'weak mayor' has more limited powers, including around terms of appointment, veto and removal.

In the commission system, all members are elected, and each commissioner is accountable for at least one city department. One of the elected members is the 'chairperson' and may interchangeably be called the mayor, but they have no additional powers<sup>6</sup>.

Again, the USA models of mayoral governance, similar to France, show how English Metro Mayor's powers are circumscribed in comparison with international counterparts. This will have a fundamental impact on the way in which Mayors, as people, seek to go about their work day to day.



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<sup>6</sup> [City Mayors: American Mayors](#)

## What makes a good Mayor? What makes Mayoral governance work?

When we talk about “good” Mayors, what we really mean is “effective” Mayors. As with any elected politician, success is measured by an ability to get things done.

The questions of what makes a good Mayor, and what makes Mayoral governance work, are not the same. The definition of a “good” (or effective) Mayor is principally about the character of the individual in the role. “Mayoral governance”, however, is a system with a large number of stakeholders. For Mayoral governance to work, everyone with a stake in the system has to recognise their individual and collective commitment to good governance. This is the case in any governance system but the Mayoral system – with its focus on one individual – makes particular demands.

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### Our view of what makes for a “good” Mayor

**Mayoral character.** Mayors need a blend of personal characteristics which combine to make them especially effective – we think that these include:

- Ability to negotiate and build consensus
- Personal drive which derives from their direct mandate
- Bringing skills to the table which aren’t necessarily associated with people that take ‘traditional’ routes into politics
- The ability to capitalise upon mayoral “convening power”
- The ability to develop a “sense of place”

**Accountability systems around Mayors.** Strong accountability – at local and national level - makes for good Mayors.

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### Mayoral character

While it is perhaps simplistic to distil the personal leadership style of many Mayors down to a choice between “combat” and “consensus”, the inherent character of Mayors has played a central role in their success – or otherwise.

What makes for the “right” character depends on the area – and seems to cut across political divides. Some Mayors have been portrayed, and have portrayed themselves, as forceful, candid, straight-talkers – cutting through bureaucracy to get things done. Others have deliberately tried to portray themselves as brokers, facilitators, convenors of discussion and agreement. Each projection of personality has its own pros and cons – and different Mayors have portrayed themselves in different roles at different times, to suit political and operational expediency. We must remember that this public image may not always reflect what is happening behind the scenes – “character”, or what we perceive as character, can be as much a political performance as anything else.

There is then an issue about how Mayors themselves perceive the nature of their “leadership” – whether it follows a traditional model of setting the direction and requiring people to follow, or whether that direction is arrived at by consensus. In order to determine this Mayor’s need to be self-aware, to reflect on their own behaviours, to step back and understand how others perceive them. The nature of Mayoral campaigning before election may impact on this. Campaigning may encourage Mayors to be vocal about the results that they can personally achieve and hence their personal clout – there may be a gulf between this ambition and the reality.

### **Are there common characteristics which make for “good Mayors”?**

It can be said that to quantify what makes for a good mayor and the traits for this can significantly differ, as there is not one singular model, it is dependent on the different circumstances for that particular region and within that, what is needed from that Mayor, and also, looking at the systems and relationships that are already in place.

With that said, there were some common threads that arose throughout the interview process that we undertook, (amongst both mayors themselves and colleagues that had a stake in mayoral governance/worked within the mayoral space) and through our own desktop research.

#### **1. Ability to negotiate and build consensus**

‘Good’, or ‘effective’, mayors should be able to recognise that because of the way that the systems and model is set-up, they must work hard to engender a sense of being a team and be able to negotiate and build consensus. Though this is an overarching characteristic that applies to all DEMs this is particularly important to Metro Mayors, who, by virtue of the system, cannot choose their cabinets. This is because they are the ‘chair’ of the cabinet, which is made up of the CA’s local authority leader’s. Oftentimes, this may mean that a large part of the make-up of LA leaders in their cabinet are from a different political party than the mayor themselves, such as Ben Houchen for example. Therefore, in this context, a skill that would make for a ‘good’ mayor is that of alliance building, something that can be achieved with informal convening powers- which we will discuss later.

#### **2. Having a direct mandate and personal drive**

Mayors arguably have more of a personal mandate than other elected members, for example, government ministers, because of the personal mandate derived from direct election. This can provide cover and support for negotiations with Government; it can also (although this principle has not been tested) offer protection from political pressure exerted by national political parties. For example, as Mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street has felt able to speak out on matters where he disagrees with his political party nationally. Many of our interviewees advised that they believed that to some extent, mayors are less accountable to their political parties, which can lead to a freer, more locally-led, style of leadership.

Having that personal drive – and the ability and freedom to make policy that reflects it - can be seen as a ‘good’ trait insofar as these types of mayors may be focused more so on the region that they are serving as opposed to appeasing internal party factions – although even incumbent Mayors will always need to have regard to party selection arrangements for the next election.

#### **3. Bringing skills to the table which aren’t necessarily associated with people that take “traditional” routes into politics**

Some mayors have not come from a traditional ‘political’ background, which brings with it different benefits – and challenges. In terms of DEMs, while a number have been former councillors, many have not. Those coming into the position as “outsiders” have identified themselves with a need to avoid traditional politics. Here, a singular drive (and a personal hinterland that may go beyond politics) is seen as a way to “cut through” local politics. Of course, it does not always turn out this way. The models of working that “outsiders” might want to adopt could chafe against councils’ “traditional” decision-making arrangements, especially where the Cabinet and the Mayor may be of a different party.

While the trope of the outsider creating friction within traditional political systems is a compelling one, it doesn’t tell the whole story.

There are traits that a mayor can bring that may not necessarily be ‘typical’, or that one would not perhaps associate with other serving politicians, like a government minister for example. One interviewee put forward the assertion that mayors are more akin to Chief Executive Officers, in that they are across a breadth of portfolios, must have a high level of long-term strategic vision and that (some) endeavour to set a positive organisational culture. The personal political accountability of the Mayor may encourage this more “hands on” approach to governance, decision-making and oversight – the role may attract people better able to juggle those responsibilities.

Interviewees had a consensus that it takes a certain kind of leadership, one which can identify certain transformational changes for their region and being able to utilise that Westminster/Whitehall connection that they have available to them. That opportunism and dynamism may well be found amongst a cadre of traditional politicians but, then again, it can take an outsider’s perspective to identify these opportunities and capitalise upon them quickly and confidently.

#### 4. The ability to capitalise upon mayoral convening power

Effective mayoral governance requires the exercise of ‘soft power’. This is especially so for metro mayors whose powers may be seen as limited, and where the ability to influence those beyond one’s remit or control is especially important.

Mayors should have the ability to bring partners together to achieve more than they could accomplish alone. This ability is not, however, about getting others to sign up to the Mayor’s own viewpoint – it is about Mayors recognising that they are one node of power in a complicated local landscape, and working in a way that recognises where they can bring their own skills, capabilities and powers to bear in bringing partners across that landscape together.

In this context, what we mean by the word “convening” can be complex, but what it probably boils down to is the power to bring people together that comes with Mayors’ significant democratic mandate. An MCA Mayor’s mandate, in particular, is typically greater than any other local or national politician. While this does not impact upon their relationship with Government, it does open up opportunities to engage with a wider range of partners. A local authority Mayor will also enjoy a substantial mandate – although it is interesting to note what happens when a local authority and an MCA Mayor serve parts of the same area.

In local authorities, powers are more settled – but it is still possible for Mayors’ powers to project significantly beyond the local authority into a range of other local institutions without the governance superstructure being there to “support” or define this process. “Ordinary” council leaders can, of course, cultivate this convening power too.

Informal convening power can evolve into something more formal. In many MCA areas, Mayors have begun to accrete more of these formal powers, taking over direct responsibilities from LEAs, Police and Crime Commissioners, Fire and Rescue Authorities, the NHS and others.

One of the criticisms of mayoral governance is that it puts too much power in the hands of the individual and that there are too many deals being made behind closed doors. Additionally, another criticism levelled at convening power is that it undermines political accountability and that it essentially evades formal scrutiny.

The operation of informal governance systems – the private spaces and forums in which local decision-makers develop their relationships and thrash out decisions – can promote the exercise of soft power. Where Mayors are active in these spaces, they can be vital in acquiring access and therefore potential tangible results for the locality that they are representing. In terms of access, this is more about being able to meet with and pick up the phone to senior politicians (i.e., government ministers) and stakeholders. While these personal connections will be present for other local actors (like council leaders), they might not be to quite the same extent,



There is, in particular, something about the cachet of the Mayoral title that will open doors – but that will only go so far. To step through those doors and drive forward conversation and decision-making in those spaces requires a certain type of character and personality. The high-profile nature of some mayors allows for this, and often if there is a ‘group’ of mayors (like the “M10” Mayoral grouping), they can hold more ‘sway’ and makes it hard for them to be ignored.

Metro Mayors have much more constrained executive powers than a DEM, and in this context, soft power, which comes with convening power, naturally then becomes a particularly important part of the governance model. Soft power is key to getting results in these areas where mayoral executive powers are constrained.

Convening powers are not just about “knocking heads together” – relationships are more nuanced and complex than this.

For Mayors, the fundamental issue is whether they can make gains for their constituents, whether these be tangible results, such as monetary outcomes or relationship building with key stakeholders.

Success is also, importantly, related to the extent to which Mayors are prepared to share benefits when things go well – and shoulder blame when they don’t. There is something about a generosity of spirit, and a political magnanimity, that runs against what we noted earlier around the “personal” drive needed for effective Mayoral governance.

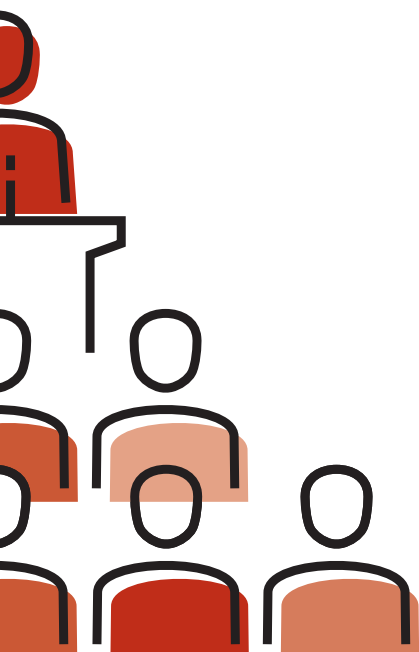
Whilst informal convening powers are an important facet of the mayoral model, it can be argued that these should evolve into more formal powers, to create a further level of transparency amongst both their constituents and other politicians. There are also questions to be raised about the legal implications of holding conversations behind closed doors and having meetings that aren’t minuted.

### 5. Mayoral ability to develop a “sense of place”

Andy Burnham and Ken Livingstone are probably the most high profile Mayors to have tried to use their character, personality and profile to contribute to a sense of place – particularly important in heading up what were two, at the time, new institutions.

The idea of the Mayor needing to create a sense of place is probably most pertinent to MCAs. The idea of a “sense of place” is closely connected to the idea of the Mayor as convenor. But while the latter is about working together to operationalise plans and “get things done”, the former is rather more about building a coherent and consistent vision for the area as a whole. Some of the areas subject to devolution deals are not ones to which people feel a natural, immediate affinity: Greater Manchester is a long-recognised conurbation but few of its inhabitants would see themselves as “Mancunians”; residents of Salford may not see themselves as being one and the same as people from Stockport. This challenge is likely to be exacerbated in county areas, where people are more likely to be perceive themselves as being from Wisbech or Peterborough than, for example, “Cambridgeshire”.

There are CA areas that do not feel like ‘natural’ geographical places, unlike GMCA and LCRCA, where a mayor can come in and be very visible and more easily find common purpose to ‘unite’ the constituent areas. In terms of place and identity, people need to have the basics in their life for example, decent homes, amenities as well as then having a clear sense of contentment and things that make them feel proud; this connects to the need for a sense of affinity with the wider area. The local authority can provide the former, i.e. the amenities whereas the Mayor has the opportunity to undertake the latter, in being a brand and a figurehead for that place. This needs to be organic and using their powers to amplify the uniting message around their area.



A “sense of place” is important because it allows people to talk frankly about trade-offs. Trade-offs are inherent in any decision affecting a wide geographic area – not every constituent authority will be able to enjoy every benefit that devolved decision-making brings. A sense of common purpose, and that outcomes will have wider impact, is necessary for the Mayoralty, and the MCA, as an institution, to enjoy wider support. This is not an abstract issue – the abolition of the GLC was of course precipitated by legal action taken by Bromley LBC against the council because of a policy on transport fares which would have brought little benefit to Bromley’s ratepayers. Similarly, the same situation is playing out with the disagreements between Khan and various outer London boroughs on the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ)

Even in local authority areas, these challenges can emerge, although at a smaller scale. They can also be mapped across characteristics other than just geography – a “sense of place” can be about culture, or diversity, or any other set of circumstances where, managed poorly, Mayoral policy could be seen as favouring one “group” over another. A sense of place is about developing a sense of community, of commonality, to support the notion that people within the community are able to think in ways that could, perhaps pejoratively, be described as “parochial”. And in a sense, reclaiming the original meaning of the word “parochial” (of the parish) but broadening it for a wider geographical concern.

The area that the Mayor spans and what systems were already in place can be a crucial factor. For example, before the creation of GMCA, there was the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) which was established in 1986. The AGMA developed policy, had statutory powers and made representations on behalf of all ten districts of Greater Manchester to the government. Therefore, there was already a sense of place that was built-in, which meant that the GMCA started in a ‘good’ position. There is an awareness of the cross-benefits for the entirety of the region, which means that there is no rivalry or jealousy from constituents. But many appreciate the notion that there are initiatives in Stockton, for example, which will also benefit those living in Salford (i.e., commuters etc). Big projects can be a major factor in developing that sense of place, for example Andy Burnham’s radial transport proposals ‘Bee Network’ seeks to implement an integrated London-style transport system which will join together buses, trams rail and active transport. Many Greater Manchester residents are in favour of this, and it aims to deepen the links within the area, which in turn hopes to engender that sense of place.

## **6. Do the character traits on which prospective Mayors campaign (decisiveness, visibility etc) map to the kinds of character traits necessary to hold the Mayoralty successfully?**

When talking about visibility, this has proved to be a success for some mayors. Andy Burnham for example, a very high-profile mayor, has managed to leverage his public image to obtain tangible results for the GM region, such as bringing the bus services into public control. Additionally, in the 2021 election, Burnham increased his vote share and won in areas that had previously voted Conservative and still did in the Local Elections that year.

Interviewees agreed that if mayors are to campaign in a decisive, ‘visible’ manner, and signal that this is how they intend to conduct their time in office, once elected they need to be engaging with their constituents, and not just on their own terms. Direct election and high visibility demands direct accountability – and it takes a certain kind of character to be able to manage that level of accountability even where many matters for which Mayors are held “responsible” may be technically out with a Mayor’s duties and powers. This is where Mayoral convening power comes in.

### Accountability systems around Mayors

Strong Mayors require strong scrutiny. But because Mayoral power is exercised in individual ways (as we note above) does this mean that scrutiny, too, needs to be bespoke to each Mayor?

The new English Devolution Accountability Framework (EDAF), published in March 2023, provides some pointers. Under the framework a Scrutiny Protocol is to be developed over summer 2023 which will make clearer where expectations lie around local accountability. One thing that is clear is that Government's expectations around Mayoral accountability at combined authority level are growing. What this will mean for local directly elected Mayors remains to be seen.

Quite apart from the national requirements of the EDAF, the nature of combined authority scrutiny and oversight will also depend on what powers have been devolved in devolution deals, and on the nature of the local economy, local demography and local geography. It is generally accepted that the current systems of oversight for Mayors – both in local authorities and combined authorities – feel quite weak. The concentration of power and influence in the hands of a Mayor arguably demands stronger oversight. But there is little sense or agreement of what this might look like.

In a local authority, stronger scrutiny could look like a different approach to Cabinet appointments – or scrutiny committees with more specific, and stronger powers over the Mayor. It could for example look like more rigorous pre-, or post-decision scrutiny – and/or an expectation that in using their powers a Mayor should be expected to consult, and involve, a wider range of people within and outside the council. It could involve Mayoral authorities choosing to put in place more radical mechanisms to draw public participation into the heart of the governance framework, as is being taken forward in Newham further to that council's Independent Democracy Commission. On the side of more conventional accountability mechanisms, the advent of Oflog suggests the scope for stronger local and national oversight mechanisms. At the moment these would apply equally to all authorities – but it could be argued that a more enhanced (but still proportionate) approach would be needed for Mayoral authorities.

Meanwhile, CfGS has suggested that strengthened accountability and oversight systems are needed around Mayors in MCAs. There is an argument that scrutiny committees should have the power to notify concerns about delivery of the devo deal to the Secretary of State – certainly, the presence of the devo deal provides a “hook” for strong scrutiny, even if the deal does look upwards to Government rather than downwards to the local community.

Since 2017 (and before) there have been long-standing moves to give a formal scrutiny role to MPs representing the local area. We are finally seeing the implementation of such measures in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands – although how exactly such bodies will work (and, indeed, what legal form they will take) remains to be seen.

CfGS has also tried to promote the idea of establishing local Public Accounts Committees – bodies which would not be focused on the MCA as an institution, but would instead be empowered to look across public services in the area. This would, however, come at a cost. The argument is that oversight brings about efficiencies and improvements that defray this cost – although this is difficult to either prove or disprove.

### Does Mayoral power demand a particular, strengthened form of accountability at local (or national) level?

The mayoral governance framework's success is dependent on how it is utilised. Some mayors for example hold regular mayoral question times to ensure that they are engaging with constituents and stakeholders; we consider that the EDAF will, in due course, make more expectations of this kind of direct Mayoral accountability at combined authority level. It is generally understood that a 'good' mayor should allow themselves to be challenged and not surround themselves with an army of 'yes people', otherwise proper accountability cannot take place.

One interviewee put forward the assertion that mayors are the most scrutinised elected politicians, because of the way the governance model is set up. They are held responsible for a huge variety of things, some of which are not in their remit, but it is important for the mayor to recognise that they are not responsible for certain matters and to not focus on these areas. However, the mayor does need to take ownership of matters that do go wrong if they are within their remit.

In the context of CAs, still relatively young, we are still finding out whether they demand a particular, strengthened form of accountability. We will, we can expect, see a mix of enhanced local accountability (through the EDAF) and, through Oflog and direct Whitehall oversight, enhanced national accountability too. The critical challenge lies in answering the question of what the local/national balance, will, and should, be.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for example, has seen governance challenges which led to the introduction of an improvement board. In CAs, there are issues surrounding what happens when mayoral "performance" is seen as poor - there are no formal powers to remove the mayor, aside from dissolving the entire CA. There is the option of a vote of no confidence, but the mayor does not have to adhere to this. The only remedy is the ballot box at the next election. CAs are "Best Value" authorities – something which brings with it attendant requirements around performance, and oversight of performance. But it feels like more clarity may be needed to discern Government's practical intentions with regard to how it holds "its" deals to account – and the personal accountability expected of Mayors around the delivery of those deals.

There are, as it stands, barriers to the design and performance of stronger local accountability for authorities with Mayors. At CA level the obvious barrier is the requirements for quoracy of overview and scrutiny committees – a subject on which CfGS and others have commented previously, at length. Through the EDAF Government has stated their intention to tackle member engagement in scrutiny – in part through allowing for member remuneration – but what steps will be necessary for practical success remain to be seen.

It remains the case that some members may not see CA business as being their priority, compared with their own local authority business. Local authority party leaders often have trouble in 'recruiting' members for scrutiny, which in turn can result in members that do not have the best skillset, end up sitting on O&S. In local authorities with DEMs this challenge is, obviously, lessened.

With that said, scrutiny can, and should, be an effective tool in holding the mayor (both at local and combined authority levels) to account, and thereby strengthening Mayoral governance. One interviewee advised that scrutiny process in CAs provides an opportunity to examine matters that they have not had a close look at. Within the CA context, budget scrutiny is usually rigorous, in the sense that the mayor is unable to sign-off on anything without the input of their cabinet (other local authority leaders)

Accountability at local level can empower delivery, but disproportionate and bureaucratic forms of accountability can easily be seen as a bit of a barrier. This is insofar as local partners do not feel that they cannot push through things where there might be a degree of conflict – that confusion over duties and responsibilities, and an overly complex governance framework, leads to business grinding to a halt.





There likely needs to be a stronger sense of oversight and accountability needed, in order to balance the increased informal powers of mayors. Some of the fundamental structures need tweaking, as when you devolve to the periphery, there also needs to be change at the core.

### **The ability to deliver, and demonstrate, better outcomes**

How do we know whether, and how, Mayors make both governance and delivery more “effective”?

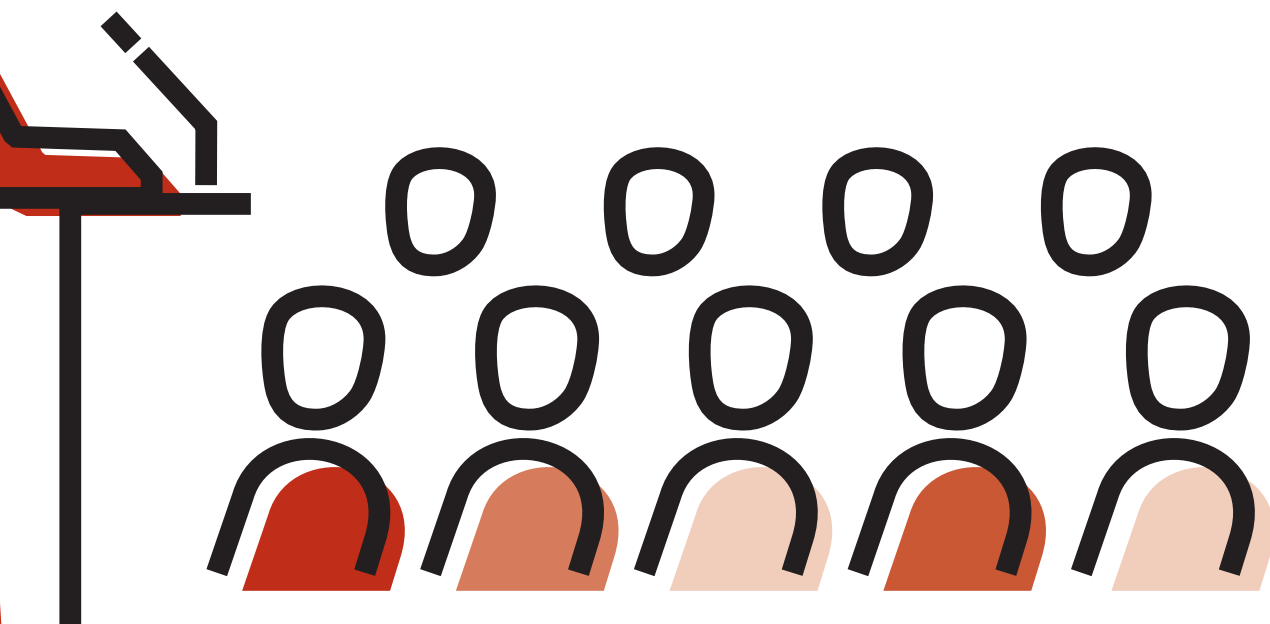
The opportunities available to Mayors in some ways echo discussions more than a decade ago, when “Total Place” introduced the possibility of joining up budgets and prioritisation in the service of the transformation of local services.

But this is exceptionally complex. Delivering at scale, or across multiple service areas, does not automatically make services more efficient or effective. There is an argument that scale in fact has negative impacts on effectiveness.

There is no evidence that Mayoral governance at a local level makes for more effective governance than the leader-cabinet model, or indeed the committee system, and no evidence that Mayoral authorities have consistently better outcomes. Equally, at MCA level, it is impossible to prove a counterfactual – the only available form of governance is one involving a Mayor, so there is nothing to compare the “impact” of MCAs against.

It may be that there are certain actions and outcomes where the presence of a Mayor – as convenor, as strong character, as person shaping a “sense of place” – have been able to bring about and cement change and improvement. The ongoing transformation of large cities’ transport networks – the introduction of franchising and ticketing for example – has been cited as an example of real outcomes being delivered in one of the few areas for which Mayors hold operational responsibility. Much has been made about the transformative impact that the London Mayorality had on the London transport system in its first decade. Equally, perhaps success here is as much about the bringing together of operational transport with wider economic development – something which CAs would have brought about even if Mayors had not been a feature.

Mayors do offer a singular focus for policy-making – a single individual whose drive and ambition for an area can help them to cut through barriers and difficulties to make a difference.



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