

What is a Combined Authority?

Summary

Combined authorities (CAs) were introduced under in the [Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009](#) ('2009 Act'), and subsequently amended by the [Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016](#). The Heart of the South West Partnership has developed this briefing note as a simple explanation of both a Mayoral and Non-Mayoral Combined Authority (CA). Following a meeting with the Secretary of State in late May, and in line with the briefing note circulated shortly afterwards, the Partnership is considering establishing a Non-Mayoral CA.

It should be noted that we are not seeking to establish a Mayoral CA at this stage, but we are keeping our options open to see what additional powers this could unlock in the future. It is important that we collectively agree to the principle of setting up a Non-Mayoral CA initially to allow us to enter into negotiations with Government at this time.

What is a Combined Authority (CA)?

England has one of the most centralised governance systems in the world. By creating a CA, the Heart of the South West partnership aims to draw down a range of new strategic powers and funding from central Government, through a Devolution Deal. This will mean that more decisions can be taken locally to better reflect local priorities. A CA can be set up by two or more local authorities. It is a formal structure with a recognised legal status. It usually has one representative from each of the constituent member local authorities, and operates on either a Leader and Cabinet, or Committee structure. A Mayoral CA also has a directly-elected Mayor who is the overall Leader or chair.

The 2016 Act removes previous limitations on the powers that a CA can exercise and permits the Secretary of State to transfer a wide range of statutory functions, including functions from public bodies. The only qualifications on this relate to the transfer of health service functions. The extent of the powers transferred depends on the Devolution Deal agreed with Government. The Secretary of State has been clear that the Mayoral CA model enables areas to draw down the most extensive range of powers. Examples of some pre-existing Combined Authorities that will become Mayoral CAs by May 2017:

- [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#)
- [Sheffield City Region](#)
- [Liverpool City Region](#)

What it's not.....

A Combined Authority is **not**:

- part of a process to instigate local government reform, or bring about unitary status.
- a take-over by any authority, nor a merger of authorities to form a 'super council'.
- about ceding (transferring) powers to a single body without the express will of the constituent local authorities.
- a 'physical entity,' for example with teams of regeneration officers from the constituent authorities sitting in one building – **unless** the constituent local authorities wish it to be. (Except for a very small core support team that is required by law)

What is a Mayoral CA?

A Mayoral CA is a new variant introduced under the 2016 Act and is different to the elected mayors that a number of councils already have in place such as Torbay.

Up until recently, the Mayor of London had a unique position within English local government, with powers over strategic planning, transport, fire and emergency planning, policing and crime, and economic development over all of London, together with an elected 25-member London Assembly with scrutiny powers. The remaining local government functions in London are performed by the 32 borough councils.

Through Devolution Deals a number of areas have agreed to have a directly elected Mayor and a CA in return for a range of additional powers. An example of this is Greater Manchester Combined Authority. It will have a different model from London as they will operate a cabinet model CA, where all GMCA leaders have a clear portfolio of responsibilities that will act as a supporting and advisory function to their Mayor and CA in respective policy areas. Elections for the GMCA Mayor will take place in May 2017.

In this example the Mayor will need to consult the Cabinet on his/her strategies, which it may reject if two-thirds of the Members do not agree. Some functions such as the Statutory Spatial Framework will need to be approved by a unanimous vote of the Cabinet.

What is the process for setting up a CA?

There are a number of routes for establishing a CA.

- 2009 Act – requires the authorities to carry out a governance review and publish a scheme recommending the creation of a combined authority. This requires the consent of the authorities involved in the scheme and the Secretary of State will agree to make a Parliamentary Order under the Act to create the CA.
- 2016 Act – the Secretary of State can establish a Combined Authority if the councils in the area consent. The Secretary of State must hold a public consultation if this has not already been undertaken locally. The Secretary of State needs to be satisfied that the CA is likely to “*improve the exercise of statutory functions*” in the area. The typical timeframe for establishing a CA through this route is 6-9 months.

An existing CA can be changed into a Mayoral CA through a Statutory Order from the Secretary of State. Any authorities that do not consent must be removed from the CA when the elected Mayor is established.

The governance review stage is important in determining the best model of CA for an area and is part of the overall scheme. In a Non-Mayoral CA the constituent members need to decide if they want a Leader and Cabinet, or a Committee style model for the CA

Can the membership of a CA be changed?

It is possible for councils to leave, or for new councils to join a CA, however Government agreement is required to amend or dissolve the Combined Authority. If a local authority wishes to leave the Combined Authority, a new review of governance arrangements would have to take place, and a revised scheme would need to be published, before the Statutory Order could be amended.

What sort of powers could the HotSW Combined Authority expect to receive through its first Devolution Deal?

No other areas of the country have been given a Devolution Deal based on the establishment of a new Non-Mayoral Combined Authority, however the Deals struck with Cornwall and West Yorkshire provide a guide as to what we might expect to be in our Deal.

We believe we are in a strong position to push for as much as possible in our first Deal with Government.

Devolution Deals tend to be incremental and to evolve over time. Once areas are able to demonstrate that they have strong and accountable governance arrangements in place, and that they can successfully deliver on the new functions, Government is willing to transfer further powers by negotiating subsequent deals. In March 2016, Greater Manchester, the pioneers of Devolution, successfully secured their 4th Deal with Government which gave them greater powers over more public services, including the criminal justice system.

All Devolution Deals have a common set of themes; however, the greatest powers, funding control, and influence are reserved for areas with Mayoral Combined Authorities. We believe that the following examples would be available to us as a bare minimum:

- **Transport** – for example around bus franchises, and determining local bus network routes
- **Learning and Skills**– for example, control of the Adult Education Budget to redesign further education
- **Business Support** – having the freedom to join up a range of Government agencies locally to provide a better, more coordinated offer to businesses
- **Employment Support** – the ability to influence commissioning of the new DWP Health and Work Programme
- **Land and Housing** – greater influence over the use or disposal of central Government land and assets, and working with Government on planning reforms

We will be pushing hard for all the powers and influence reflected in the 'Asks' in our Prospectus. In particular, we will be making a strong case to secure a long term investment commitment for the infrastructure we need to unlock growth.

How would it impact on my Council?

The CA does not replace the existing member Councils, it operates alongside and allows those members to draw down and exercise a range of powers and control funding from Government they would not otherwise be able to access. It means that local politicians have greater control over decision making traditionally held in Westminster. The extent of the powers is determined by the Devolution Deal negotiated with Government.

It is not intended for any existing council functions across Devon and Somerset councils to transfer to the CA at the time of its establishment, but once established it would be possible, where there is a clear benefit, for councils to transfer functions into the CA, subject to agreement.

Further information

House of Commons Briefing Paper on Combined Authority – February 2016
<http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN06649/SN06649.pdf>