

Agenda Item 3

Devolution Consultation Draft Response

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that establishing a Mayoral Combined County Authority over the proposed geography will deliver benefits to the area?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- **Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Explanation: Chichester City Council are not convinced that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the creation of a Mayoral Combined County Authority (MCCA) across such a wide and diverse area will deliver tangible benefits. To date the MCCA model has been rolled out in urban areas which share common characteristics across a much smaller geographic footprint.

It is not clear how this model will translate into success over a much larger and more mixed geography. We have concerns that the MCCA model has not been applied across a region that encompasses everything from densely populated urban cities such as Brighton and Crawley, small market towns such as Lewes, Horsham and Chichester and a huge swathe of sparsely populated rural villages within the South Downs National Park. It is uncertain that an MCCA will be able to effectively balance the competing needs and priorities of these very different populations and how it will interface with the National Park Authority.

We are also not convinced that there is a compelling case for the proposed geography of the MCCA – many of the most significant issues (e.g. South Coast transport connectivity) crosses different geographical boundaries (e.g. the A27 is a problem from Kent to Hampshire) and it is not clear from the proposals how neighbouring authorities (both MCCAs and Unitaries) will be required to cooperate.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed governance arrangements for the Mayoral Combined County Authority?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Explanation: We are concerned that the proposed governance model appears opaque and does not give good accountability or democratic representation for local people. Essentially five people could make decisions that affect 1.5 million residents. It is also unclear how it will be ensured that decision makers represent a range of often opposing regional needs, for example, urban and rural areas. Without specific formal requirements for effective representation, there is a risk that densely populated urban areas could dominate the focus of the MCCA and lead to detrimental outcomes for more sparsely populated rural settlements.

It is also not clear how constituent membership of the MCCA will be compatible with the 2011 Localism Act, particularly with regard to pre-determination and pre-disposition and more detail needs to be provided to demonstrate how the tensions between membership of the MCCA and membership of the County Unitary Authorities will be managed to ensure that the Code of Conduct is upheld and decisions are made in an open and transparent manner.

The criteria and method for appointment of non-constituent associate members to the authority is also ill-defined, and potentially open to perceptions of corruption and undue influence. More detail needs to be provided on both how the creation of inherent bias in favour of specific areas or interests will be avoided and, equally importantly, how the perception of this will be comprehensively refuted.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the economy of the area?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Explanation: Although we can see some cases (e.g. tourism development) where a regional approach would be much more advantageous, it is hard to see how this would translate for other areas of development (e.g. cultural strategy); we are not certain that a coherent, overarching regional cultural strategy can be effectively created for an area that incorporates a vast National Park and rural hinterland alongside a vibrant, urban cultural hub such as Brighton without the large urban centres inevitably sucking in all of the investment and focus.

It is unclear at this stage how the MCCA will help to tackle some of the key issues affecting the area – e.g. powers over rail services will be mostly irrelevant for the huge area of the region that has no access to mainline rail services. There is no evidence that powers over bus regulation can be cost-effectively deployed to deliver benefits for sparse rural populations. It is, for example, hard to see how a skills development programme could be effectively delivered in a sparse rural area where the population density will make it extremely challenging and therefore avoid further entrenching existing disadvantages around access to opportunities.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve social outcomes in the area?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Explanation: Again, at this stage we struggle to see how social outcomes across such diverse settlements with such different socio-economic characteristics and varied problems (e.g. a small, wealthy, rural settlement such as Fernhurst which has very specific issues around ageing demographics and access to services compared to a large urban settlement such as Crawley which has very different issues around housing and deprivation) will be able to be tackled in a regional/strategic scale. The huge geographic scope of the proposed MCCA feels ill-equipped to deal with such locally specific problems and risks benefits being unevenly distributed throughout the region.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve local government services in the area?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Explanation: We believe that where viable opportunities for regional working exist, they are already in place – e.g. Sussex police already operate across all three authority boundaries, as does the NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board. Constraints to development and planning such as the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and Nitrate Neutrality already affect all three areas, so it is hard to see how this will be changed by the development of the MCCA. There may be some opportunities to share best practice between authorities and tourism seems to be a potential area for regional benefits to be realised, but we believe that the additional benefits of creating the MCCA may be limited.

Question 6: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through a Mayoral Combined County Authority will improve the local natural environment and overall national environment?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- **Disagree**
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

Explanation: A huge part of the proposed area is already covered by the SDNP, which is governed by strict legislation that already affords significant environmental protections and incorporates cross-border working from Hampshire through to the Kent border. It is not proposed that the boundary, designation, status or management responsibilities of the National Park will be changed by devolution, so much of the status quo will remain unchanged. For those areas outside of the SDNP, there is already a large network of sites covered by various environmental designations (SPA, Ramsar, AONB, SNCI, SA, MCZ, NNR, LNR), which place strict constraints and limits on how the land must be managed. There is some scope for the MCCA to better join this patchwork of sites into a unified whole but given the huge development and housing pressures affecting the region, it is not clear that this will be achievable and how the priorities will (or, indeed, can) be balanced. There is a real risk of the MCCA overruling local environmental needs due to the inherent weaknesses in the proposed governance arrangements.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across the proposed geography through the Mayoral Combined County Authority will support the interests and needs of local communities and reflect local identities?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

It is impossible to support the proposal at this time as there is no explanation of what is meant by hyper local representation and what this will mean for residents.

The government need to clearly articulate the role of parish and town councils in the proposed new arrangements and legislate to ensure that services and powers can be quickly and effectively devolved down to local communities. This will include looking at how the rules concerning asset transfers and best value are applied when transfers take place between local authorities. A principle should be established that where assets or services that create new financial liabilities are transferred between authorities, revenue generating opportunities should also be transferred to avoid adverse impacts upon local precepts and ensure long-term sustainability of services.

The rights of residents to access minimum standards of services should also be formalised, and if necessary, the community right to challenge should be strengthened to allow the creation of 'hubs' for local service access, funded via statutory agency agreements from strategic and higher tier authorities. Minimum levels of representation for the community sector (possibly via local council county associations) should be a requirement for the MCCA non-constituent membership.

Detailed consideration should be given to conducting community governance reviews and establishing local town and parish councils in unparished areas to ensure consistent hyper local democratic representation across the MCCA, with agreed minimum consultation and engagement standards laid down in legislation.