**2024 PRIORITIES FOR UK MAYORS**

1. Building on recent discussions between Mayors, it is proposed that in 2024 the UK Mayors network focuses attention on a small number of core priorities. Proposed priorities for Mayors to consider are:
	1. Creating the conditions to strengthen regional growth and improve productivity, helping people develop their skills; strengthen health and wellbeing; addressing the climate and nature emergencies and delivering improved quality of life for people across our regions.
	2. Making the case for sustainable funding settlements to MCAs and local councils, enabling our institutions to deliver for our regions; and for the transformational funding required toimprove public services and make them sustainable well into the future.
	3. Building the case for further devolution and the single funding settlement that will have a positive impact for our regions.
2. There are clear interdependencies between these priorities and, as agreed at the last meeting of UK Mayors, the focus of work around these priorities can be brought together through an annual devolution report which it is proposed we aim to publish in the Autumn alongside a first annual UK Mayors event (though the General Election may mean we seek to publish earlier).
3. If Mayors are content with the priorities above, a work programme for the year will be developed and agreed with the CEO group. This will draw on the Mayoral discussion in late 2023, where it was agreed we would look to produce an annual UK Mayors devolution report; hold a first UK Mayors event/conference; and look to strengthen our international links.

**DRAFT NARRATIVE FOR MAYORAL CONTRIBUTION TO CURRENT POLICY DEBATE ON HOW TO RESTORE GROWTH TO THE UK**

1. Devolved regional leadership has been in place since 2000 in England with the election of the Mayor of London. The wave of Metro Mayors was then elected in 2017 across a number of regions. In 2024, these regions will have their third set of Mayoral elections. New Mayors are also being elected in other parts of the country. Devolved regional leadership is here to stay. Across the members of the UK Mayors network, from May 2024, we will represent 48% of England’s population; our regions will deliver 54% of England’s GDP; and 51% of England’s workforce will be working across the towns, cities and communities we represent. Devolved leadership of our places is not just here to stay, it is growing.
2. . Working with our local partners, we have plans in place to help our regions grow and capitalise on the amazing assets found in each of our regions. We can bring together local partners and, unlike Ministers and officials in Whitehall, we have a deep understanding and connection to the places we represent.
3. Our ambition is to unlock growth and sustainable public services across our regions and continue to decarbonise and improve nature recovery in our regions improving the lives and opportunities open to the people who call our regions home. To do that, we believe we need to go further in strengthening the English devolution settlement and truly embedding devolution in the way the UK is run.
4. Since 2000 in London, and more broadly since 2017, devolved leadership has enabled tangible impact for our regions: new transport options; franchising; improving transport services for the first time in a generation. We’ve also overseen improved skills offers; new trade links; building new homes; tackling homelessness and much more. Our regions have also led the charge towards decarbonisation, with all regions declaring a climate emergency ahead of the national 2050 target, delivering retrofit schemes and taking action to generate renewable energy. Working together with partners in our local areas, we are seeing new approaches to delivering for our places have positive impact on the ground for people and communities.
5. But we know there is more to do. Across all our regions, we are ambitious to see our economies and public services grow; to open up new opportunities for the people who call our regions home; and to continue to improve and decarbonise transport, housing, and make jobs available to people in our regions; to support private sector growth in all parts of the country, building clusters of growth that make sense for our individual regional economies. It is through tackling these challenges in an integrated way – drawing together local partners – that we will see our places thrive.
6. To achieve our ambitions, in 2024, we need to work with our partners across local government and national government to strengthen the way our country grows. There will be a General Election in 2024. When thinking about policy priorities and the structure of Government, our political parties should have devolution in mind right across the spectrum of Government Departments. Our recent history (under both Conservative and Labour Governments) is littered with examples of policy change that has had more limited impact than it might have had due to being driven from the centre with little engagement with local and regional leaders.
7. The Covid pandemic reinforced for us that the way decisions are made has not yet evolved to keep pace with the democratic institutions that now exist across our country. During the pandemic, government recentralised, it had limited engagement with local and regional leaders and it missed the opportunity to capitalise on the ability of local services to play a core role in tackling Covid and supporting people across the country.
8. While Metro Mayors have been in place since 2017, there is no formal route through which we routinely speak with Government Ministers. With some notable exceptions, there has been no real change to the way Whitehall or Parliament works to reflect the fact that we now have democratically elected regional leaders. This needs to change if we want to see growth restored to all our regions. Ministers are taking decisions and implementing reform based on their democratic mandate – so are Mayors and their local partners. To strengthen the way devolution works in practice, those charged with taking policy decisions must work together.
9. . The UK is a collection of diverse places, a one size fits all approach to policy making is not the best approach to helping our country and our regions thrive. Mayors and their partners must also have the powers and freedoms to innovate and take policy decisions that make sense for their place.
10. You’d expect this to be an argument Metro Mayors would make. But it’s not just us making the case for change. Across think tank reports, national commissions, regional economic reviews, and academics – the case is made time and again that the UK is being held back by overcentralisation. Regional inequalities in the UK are starker than many of our neighbours; the economic gap between London and our other cities is wider than found in other countries; and in London and beyond the inequalities within each of our regions is a challenge we are each seeking to tackle. We cannot become a stagnation nation.
11. We have the democratic structures to address this, we just need Government to choose to fully unleash devolution. Mayors can be the engines of growth.
12. We know the answer to this is for local, regional and national government to work together. The changes we think are needed are not headline grabbing, but they could lead to significant improvements for future of our regions. There is action that we will take to strengthen the impact we are having for our places. We will:
13. **Have a delivery mindset.** Our primary focus as Mayors is to get on and deliver for our places. We’re pragmatic. We know we need to work across parties and with a wide range of partners. We are committed to making progress for our places – not holding back from action while we wait for perfection. We’ll roll our sleeves up and get around the table with others to find ways to work together and deliver new jobs; new homes; investment in R&D; new transport solutions; and much more. We’re taking decisions on these issues in an integrated way, ensuring our transport plans match up with our housing plans. Ensuring investment in new jobs is supported by skills provision that will enable local residents to access good new employment opportunities. Delivery for places as a whole.
14. **Take an unrelenting focus on net zero.** As we help our places grow, we know we must do this in a way that helps achieve net zero. Our economy must shift to be green first – this gives us real opportunities. From investment in battery technology to growth in green house building skills, we know that achieving net zero is not about limiting our places and what they can do. Net zero will kick start the next industrial revolution – with the right focus and investment, we can be at the forefront of that change.
15. **Focus on public service reform.** The reform of public services is as important in delivering growth in our regions as long-term investment. We need early years services that give our children the best start in life; education and skills provision that sets people up with the skills our economies need; health and social care services that are focused on improving all of our wellbeing; and emergency services that keep our homes and communities safe. The reform of public services is something Mayors and local partners should be leading for their places. Transport should be seen in the same way – poor public transport is a significant inhibitor to regional growth and the wellbeing of our citizens and communities. Working with partners to tackle poor and unaffordable public transport is at the heart of how Mayors can have impact.
16. In addition, working with Government, we will seek to strengthen:
17. **Longer-term investment in our places.** The issues holding some of our communities back are long-term. We need to provide confidence and certainty to people across our regions that change will be delivered. For that to happen, we need longer-term investment plans that will kick start a growth.. We have the answer to this in the single funding settlement deals already reached with Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. This model needs to be extended across the country alongside agreement between each Mayor and Government of a single set of regional priorities that will help accelerate growth. We need to deliver even more reform to our transport networks to ensure people are able to access jobs – sustainable funding for regional transport provision is needed to help close the gaps between our economies and support the drive to decarbonisation. Long-term funding would also help Mayors and our partners deliver improved and sustainable leisure and cultural activities; skills provision; healthcare and other services – the nuts and bolts that help places function and grow and that will help reduce the disparities between our regions . We need to be able to give international investors the confidence that our regions are the places they want to come to build their businesses. We can only do these things with longer-term funding certainty, including a long-term sustainable financing proposal for public transport. With long-term investment should come a continued focus on local accountability arrangements – we want absolute transparency so that voters in our regions can be assured that investment is managed well.
18. **Regular updates to the devolution settlement, scheduled for every two years.** As growth is restored, the opportunities and challenges our regions face will evolve. We need a scheduled review of the range of devolved powers needed to help places thrive every two years, rather than relying on ad hoc devolution deals or the discretion of individual government departments. – including the fiscal devolution that could help our places grow. We propose to produce a proposal for Government setting out how we think devolution can be strengthened and what impact our proposals will deliver this Autumn. Trailblazer devolution deals have been an important step forward, we want to build on this.
19. **Regular Mayoral / Ministerial summits, improving the impact of devolution through better collaboration.** Cabinet ministers meet with each other every week. Mayors, as elected leaders of their regions are taking decisions with their local partners on a daily basis that are impacted (or will impact) national policy. To deliver growth in our regions, Mayors and Ministers from across government need to work together and establish strong relationships so they are able to tackle the specific barriers to growth found in different parts of the country. These summits should include Ministers from across government. Generating growth and improving our regions is not siloed, so our collaboration with government should not be either. In other parts of the world, the productivity gap between larger and smaller cities is not as pronounced as it is in the UK –we could close that gap in the UK as well by working more closely together.
20. In short, we need to embed devolved regional leadership in our national governance and decision-making systems. While that may seem like an inconsequential internal government issue – our experience has convinced us it’s the change that will unlock growth across the UK.
21. In the longer-term, we need to empower places further. Fiscal devolution is part of the landscape in many other countries across the world. As devolution continues to embed and evolve in England, fiscal devolution is a question that we are clear we should continue to discuss.
22. 2024 is a General Election year. There will be a great deal of debate and comment on the changes needed across the UK. It’s of course an important debate, in which we will play our part. But at the same time, we’ll be getting on delivering for our places, ready to work with whomever forms the next government.