

1 There should be a presumption towards localism by central government

The key debate on city regions is: should devolution relate to ‘earned local autonomy’ or ‘presumed local autonomy’? Presumed autonomy is the most localist approach, and this approach should be given to all major cities, and extended even further to other forms of local government. There should be no centralised measure of ‘performance’ as national departmental perspectives do not always align with local priorities and needs.

2 A localist approach enables better decision making for economic development, transport and skills

Granting statutory powers for economic development, transport and skills will enhance the economic development of Greater Manchester – more closely aligning governing structures with real economic geographies. A coherent brand for Greater Manchester would also encourage more growth and competition with other European cities. But, there should always be a presumption to devolve power to as low a spatial level as possible.

3 Thinking should shift away from a focus on structures to one of achieving outcomes

No one size fits all. National policy should facilitate organic, bottom up, fluid, entrepreneurial cooperation across authorities and between authorities and the private and voluntary sectors. Funding should be focused on outcomes rather than institutions, restrictions on data sharing should be removed and shared budgets should be used when possible.

4 Financial freedoms should be enhanced at the local level

Statutory city region status does not guarantee delivery on all key strategic priorities. However, extra financial incentives and financial freedoms for local government would make a significant contribution to reform. This could include re-localisation of business rates or councils keeping savings from the Operational Efficiency Programme.

5 Statutory powers and financial freedoms should be extended to other cities and councils

City region status or changes to the governance of cities through the creation of directly elected mayors and the devolution of more powers to local government should not be limited to Greater Manchester – indeed our survey results show that there is a significant appetite for the idea elsewhere.

6 National policy must give up its obsession with equalisation

Equalisation prioritises the spatial geography over the economic geography and has the potential to damage the strength of the national economy, through focusing funding on schemes which have little or no beneficial outcomes. Instead, investment programmes should focus more on connecting places more effectively to the strong economic hubs of localities and regions, both through better transport links and the internet.

7 Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) should be dismantled

Where groupings of councils can demonstrate the ability to think strategically at a meaningful spatial level, they should be handed the powers and funding from central government, RDAs and other interfering quangos. Economic development and transport should be prioritised.

8 Clear lines of responsibility and accountability are vital for effective local governance structures

Addressing the problem of confused responsibility and duplication is the most important factor in creating clear lines of accountability to the public. Directly elected mayors are an option, but it is more important that bureaucracy and duplication are reduced between all public services operating locally.

9 An environment for meaningful partnerships should be created

Partnership is not about partners merely ticking the appropriate boxes, as has been the case many times under the Local Strategic Partnerships umbrella. Partnerships are about delivering tangible, concrete improvements, such as the mutual ownership of Manchester airport, or a more sustainable waste strategy.

10 Localist governance could potentially increase innovation and the spread of innovative practice

Local people know best about their local area. The most efficient decentralised governance structure captures and applies local knowledge and expertise to improve processes, spread innovation and improve outcomes. Extra flexibilities in funding will help allow for a culture of innovation to thrive.