

WECA Online Consultation Submission 10th April 2026

Q1 Do you believe that North Somerset Council should join the West of England Combined Authority?

This consultation is being undertaken by WECA and clearly shows its intent to 'expand into North Somerset'. This is not the same as a consultation from North Somerset Council elected representatives with North Somerset residents, asking them whether they wish to join WECA. Why did the online deadline time change from 23:59 to 10am and back to 23:59?

Q2 To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across a wider Combined Authority area will support economic growth?

Strongly disagree.

Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across a wider Combined Authority area will improve public services?

Strongly disagree.

Q4 To what extent do you agree or disagree that working across a wider Combined Authority area will support the diverse interests and needs of local communities?

Strongly disagree.

Q5 What benefits do you think can be achieved through expanding the West of England Combined Authority into North Somerset?

Arguments given to join WECA have been financially based and not arising from public need or discussions.

Q6 What activities and projects would you identify as priorities for an expanded West of England Combined Authority?

Priorities should be based on local representation. Urban priorities should not take priority over rural priorities and representation. Rural food production and food security should take priority over urban housing sprawl (that can be accommodated on brownfield/not green field sites), solar energy (that can be accommodated on roofs), BNG, etc.

Q7 Do you have any concerns about the proposal to expand the West of England Combined Authority to include North Somerset? If so, what could be done to help address those concerns?

There is not enough information regarding the dis-benefits of joining WECA. There is no clear statement on what powers North Somerset Council will or could lose/give over to WECA.

There is no clear statement of future taxation implications for residents, e.g. LGA states, "All CAs can be funded by their constituent councils through a levy... Elected mayors can raise additional resources through a precept (or additional charge) on local council tax bills... All CAs will have the power to borrow money... Many devolution deals include the retention of local business rate growth above an agreed threshold... In addition, elected mayors will be able to increase business rates by 2p in the pound if the relevant Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) agrees. Many devolution deals also include other devolved resources including an investment fund."

There is no clear information on accountability. WECA is a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) – where “Each member pays tax on their share of the profits, as in an ‘ordinary’ business partnership, but they are not personally liable for any debts the business cannot pay.” Please see Companies House for West of England Combined Authority membership <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/officers/mTRcYbydU1d5VP-nYsPRBxW5jbo/appointments>

The UK has a constitution. Regionalisation (joining WECA) fragments governance in England without a coherent constitutional framework. Regionalisation treats England as an administrative area rather than a constitutional entity. This is therefore administrative decentralisation, not true constitutional devolution. Power will be exercised locally, but authority will remain central. There will be a blurring of accountability and undermining constitutional clarity.

Regionalisation creates bodies exercising significant power without constitutional entrenchment, undermining legal certainty and democratic legitimacy. This process has not involved a referendum. It appears that decisions will be agreed through elite bargains between central government and local leaders, rather than with the people whose voice should be represented. Fundamental changes to how power is exercised should carry direct democratic consent, otherwise they lack constitutional legitimacy.

A single person, the mayor, in a devolved combined authority should not have the power to set the overall strategic vision for the region’s economic and social development, exercise devolved powers transferred from central government. That is the role of elected representatives at all levels of government.

Transport, Skills and adult education, Housing and planning, Economic development and infrastructure investment and policing or health-related coordination significantly differ in rural compared to urban areas. WECA priorities may be skewed to the higher urban population of Bristol, ignoring or downgrading rural needs and priorities.

Although mayors work with council leaders, they are not just a figurehead, they are a genuine executive decision-maker. This single person’s ‘view’ of priorities is not the same as full consultation and referendum with residents via elected representatives. The mayor’s choice of who/which partners to include and engagement on regional priorities may not fully represent local need and representation, especially in rural areas. The mayor’s strategic and region-wide focus may override local needs and priorities.