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Consultation on North Somerset joining combined authority

Image credit: Freia Turland

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority is set to approve the start of a consultation on the combined authority expanding to include North Somerset Council.

Negotiations with the national government have already unlocked an additional £15 million in the short-term for projects in the region, should North Somerset join. An additional £1 million has been offered to assist with the process of the local authority joining Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, and South Gloucestershire councils as a full member of the regional authority, led by the Mayor of the West of England. This funding adds to unprecedented investment confirmed in the area since May, bringing the total to almost £1 billion, while the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill making its way through Parliament and as regional mayors and

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The government has also committed that, should the expansion proceed, future funding will *“take account of an expanded WECA geography and population”*: likely increasing future allocations of funding transport improvements and a major new national housing fund. North Somerset joining would add 23% to the combined authority’s population, to a total of 1.225 million, bringing the benefits of devolution to another almost quarter of a million more people and further strengthening the voice of our part of the world. Altogether, the West has the strongest recent economic growth of any region in the country and, since 2019, has consistently grown at four times the national average.

The proposal follows the Government’s English Devolution White Paper, which requires every local authority area to be part of a strategic authority. The Government has confirmed that the West of England is the best fit for North Somerset and has asked the region to seek views before any decision is taken.

Helen Godwin, Mayor of the West of England, said:

“Working together since May, we have given 1.1 million free bus journeys through Kids Go Free, secured the green light for reopening the Bristol to Portishead railway line, and developed an ambitious Growth Strategy for our future. People can see that we are doing things differently, breaking with the past nine years and building a better future with more regional powers to deliver more for local people.

“Together we have negotiated a deal that’s a real vote of confidence from the government. The new chapter that we have started in the West is being backed up with new investment. Millions of pounds more for local projects, and a commitment to greater funding in future based on our larger geography, would make a real difference for communities across our region.

“Supported by local leaders across party and council boundaries both before and after the election, together we have built momentum towards a consultation on North Somerset joining the combined authority. I am looking forward to hearing from local residents and businesses across Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire as we consider what I know many feel to be a long overdue next step.”

Councillor Mike Bell, Leader of North Somerset Council, said:

"I hope that people across the area will get involved in the consultation and share their views. This is a pivotal point for North Somerset which will enable us to ensure that our local communities get maximum benefit from powers – and funding – being devolved from central government. Our region is stronger when working together and I hope the expansion will be supported so we can deliver lasting improvements for everyone across the West."

Councillor Kevin Guy, Leader of Bath & North East Somerset Council and Deputy Mayor, said:

"At the heart of this is the need to secure as much investment as we can for our region for the benefit of our economy and all our communities. We have always worked closely with North Somerset and I will be encouraging residents in Bath & North East Somerset to get involved and have their say when the consultation starts."

Councillor Tony Dyer, Leader of Bristol City Council, said:

"This consultation marks an important next step towards potentially welcoming North Somerset fully into the West of England Combined Authority. We've already seen that the closer working between our local authorities and the Mayor is bearing fruit and creating new opportunities to deliver our ambitions for our region. We welcome the indication from government of an upward trajectory for regional investment and the growing recognition of the value the West of England secures for the national economy. Whilst we advocate for the expansion of the Combined Authority to include North Somerset, we also want to ensure we're doing so with a fully informed plan that includes the voices of residents. I look forward to discussing the proposals with my counterparts in the region during our meeting at the end of the month."

Councillor Maggie Tyrrell, Leader of South Gloucestershire Council, and Councillor Ian Boulton, Co-Leader of South Gloucestershire Council, said:

"We welcome the opening of the consultation and encourage residents to learn about the proposed changes and to submit their views. Our region will be shaped by these important decisions and it

is vital that we hear your input. We will always look to work with our neighbours whilst maintaining our individuality.”

Since May, Helen Godwin and council leaders have [worked more closely together](#) . The Growth Strategy, which sets out [an ambitious plan for 72,000 new jobs for the region](#) , highlights that the economic outlook for the area is stronger if the combined authority includes North Somerset, to reflect the economic reality of how the region works by including places like Weston-super-Mare, Clevedon, and Portishead, as well as the Royal Portbury Dock and Bristol Airport. North Somerset has in recent months also partnered with the regional authority and local councils in work towards a new Spatial Development Strategy, and signed up to the West’s Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England, as part of efforts to tackle the housing crisis.

In September 2025, North Somerset Council voted to approve progressing plans for a consultation, followed by the Mayor and council leaders doing the same in October. In the timeline set out in a paper to be considered by the Mayor and council leaders [at their next meeting on 30 January](#) , a six to eight week consultation is proposed to take place in February and March. Ministers would consider consultation findings between April and June and, after approval from the Secretary of State, legislation would then need to be drafted from June to be considered at the Mayor and council leaders’ meeting in October. Subject to the parliamentary calendar, the legislative process would be expected to take around eight weeks, with North Somerset likely to become a full member of the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority from late 2026 or early 2027. The next election of the Mayor of the West of England will take place in May 2029.

An expansion of the combined authority would also support its efforts to become an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority (EMSA), like West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, and others, with an integrated settlement that sees budgets fully devolved from Westminster for housing, regeneration, local growth, local transport, skills, retrofit, and employment support. In a letter to the Mayor and Leader of North Somerset Council in December, the Devolution Minister confirmed that the government would work with the West of England on our *“application to be granted EMSA status to the*

fastest possible timeline". Mayor Godwin has spoken repeatedly about the need to catch up with other regions, and this commitment from the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government follows Active Travel England's assessment late last year which [ranked the West at the same top level as bigger regions such as the West Midlands](#) .

Taking a step forward, with North Somerset as a member and with established authority status, the West of England would gain the right to request rail devolution and priority for support with delivering multi-modal ticketing. On skills, Jobcentre Plus would come into alignment with the region, and delivering and commissioning additional employment support to get more people into work would be delegated to the area. Our part of the world would also then be able to set the strategic direction of any future programmes to support affordable homes being built and secure retrofit funding for more decisions to be made in the West of England rather than in Westminster.

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