

CONSULTATION: EXPANDING THE WEST OF ENGLAND COMBINED AUTHORITY INTO NORTH SOMERSET

PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION

This consultation seeks views from residents and organisations across all parts of the West of England on a proposal for expansion of the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority to incorporate North Somerset Council.

In December 2024, the government published the English Devolution White Paper. This sets out plans to move power out of Westminster and back to local communities, ensuring that every part of England is covered by devolution. As part of this move towards greater devolution, there has been strong support locally for North Somerset Council to join the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and gain access to the additional powers and funding that membership of a Combined Authority brings. This expansion is also supported by national government.

Before taking a decision on whether to proceed with including North Somerset within the existing Combined Authority covering the West of England region, the Combined Authority is seeking views from interested parties, including those who live, work, and/or have businesses within the existing West of England area and North Somerset Council area.

This is not a referendum. This consultation is advisory and will be used by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (WECA) and North Somerset Council to inform their decisions and approach to expansion. Responses will be considered as part of the decision-making process but the consultation itself is not binding.

TIMING OF THE CONSULTATION

This consultation will remain open for responses until **23.59 on Friday 10 April 2026**.

HOW TO RESPOND

We encourage everyone to use this opportunity to share your opinions on the proposal for expanding the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority to include North Somerset.

The easiest way for you to respond and engage in the consultation is by completing the online form.



Prefer a paper copy?

Request this by emailing comms@westofengland-ca.gov.uk or calling **0117 428 6210** and leaving your contact details. Paper copies are also available in some libraries, GPs and community hubs.

Return by email or post using Freepost: West of England Combined Authority on the envelope.

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WEST | MAYORAL
OF ENGLAND | COMBINED
AUTHORITY

The consultation is open until Friday 10 April 2026

CONTEXT

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority (WECA for short) was established in 2017, comprised of Bath & North East Somerset, Bristol, and South Gloucestershire Unitary Authorities. North Somerset Council did not join at that point.

The proposal to consult on North Somerset joining WECA is supported by the Mayor of the West of England, Helen Godwin, the three leaders of the existing constituent Unitary Authorities, and was agreed by the Full Council meeting of North Somerset Council on 16 September 2025. The government has set out the financial implications of joining for the whole region, the details of which are set out below.

PROPOSED GEOGRAPHY



WHY WE ARE PROPOSING TO EXPAND THE MAYORAL COMBINED AUTHORITY

The government has committed to expanding English devolution to cover every area of the nation. The English Devolution White Paper says, “Our goal is simple. Universal coverage in England of Strategic Authorities – which should be a number of councils working together, covering areas that people recognise and work in” and “the government’s strong preference is for partnerships that bring more than one local authority together over a large geography.”

Strategic Authorities have responsibility over the coordination of the following areas, using region-wide funding and a strategic approach to solving regional challenges to deliver economic growth, improved public services, and an enhanced natural environment. Specific areas of competence are:

- Transport and local infrastructure.
- Skills and employment support.
- Housing and strategic planning.
- Economic development and regeneration.
- Environment and climate change.
- Health, wellbeing and public service reform.
- Public safety.

Strategic Authorities, of which Mayoral Strategic Authorities are one subset, will also in future benefit from Integrated Settlements, bringing consolidated budgets across their areas of competence with increased flexibility to move and allocate funding between and across areas of priority. Currently, WECA is in government terminology, a ‘Mayoral Strategic Authority’ rather than a ‘Established Mayoral Strategic Authority’ but it is seeking to obtain that latter status, which brings a further level of devolution.

The expansion of WECA to include North Somerset would have the best chance of economic alignment, given the important links that already exist between North Somerset communities and the Mayoral Combined Authority area. Alternative arrangements would fail to achieve this. The government supports this option as the best way of securing additional economic growth and investment in the region.

From the North Somerset perspective, the primary reasons for reconsidering membership at this stage is the potential for greater investment in important areas like public transport, adult skills, and environmental protection. There is a renewed government focus on extending devolution and the need to access funding that is specifically earmarked for Strategic Authorities to support delivery of infrastructure and economic growth. By joining, North Somerset would have full access to this funding for the first time, rather than relying on ad hoc arrangements or missing out entirely.

There is a long-standing recognition of the economic links between North Somerset and WECA. 22% of North Somerset working residents work in the WECA area, and 9% of North Somerset's workers live in the West of England. Students and young people cross boundaries to attend school, college and university. Businesses generally will look across boundaries and administrative borders, as is the case with Bristol/Portbury docks. Creative industries work between the areas, with TV and film companies based in Bristol, including the BBC and Channel 4, often choosing North Somerset as a filming location. People travel from Bristol and Bath to North Somerset and vice versa for leisure activities and retail. Economic growth in North Somerset is intrinsically linked to the economic growth of the wider region and vice versa.

Collaboration between North Somerset Council and WECA has been strong. Recently the jointly published Growth Strategy for the region has highlighted the enormous contribution of North Somerset to the region and particularly its further potential through two Growth Zones, which will be central to delivering the future economic growth of the region. The delivery of the Strategy will involve partnership working on attracting inward investment, a Joint Local Travel Plan, and extensive delivery of economic and skills projects, benefiting workers and businesses in North Somerset and the wider region. Brownfield housing and town centre regeneration would also be key projects.

Devolution is already delivering a positive impact in the West of England.

The leadership of North Somerset Council, the West of England Mayor, and all existing members of WECA (i.e. the leaders of the three current constituent Unitary Authorities) are supportive of the proposal to expand WECA to include North Somerset.

If North Somerset becomes a constituent member of the expanded West of England



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Mayoral Combined Authority, it will automatically have representation on the WECA Committee. This would ensure that regional decision making takes account of the challenges and opportunities across this area. It would also ensure that opportunities for growth and reform bring together opportunities covering the full Functional Economic Area of the region, improving outcomes for all residents.

Some of the potential benefits for the entire region from expansion of WECA include:

- Greater economic opportunities for the future through integrated resources, aligned policy levers, and strengthened regional competitiveness and productivity
- A fully integrated transport system that boosts productivity across the region
- A coherent place-based strategy for the entire West of England
- A more effective and inclusive skills system for the whole region
- Stronger and clearer offer to government and investors.

WHAT DECISIONS AFFECTING PUBLIC SERVICES IN NORTH SOMERSET AND THE WIDER REGION WOULD BE MADE AT A REGIONAL LEVEL

As a result of expansion, North Somerset would have equal decision making and voting power on the WECA Committee as the other constituent authorities. It will work with WECA and the other constituent authorities collaboratively to decide regional priorities and important investment decisions in the Combined Authority's areas of competence. With the caveat that further devolution may change the responsibilities of Combined Authorities in the future, and that Unitary Authorities remain important strategic and delivery partners in these policy areas, the relevant competencies include:

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TRANSPORT AND LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The government believes that high quality transport infrastructure and services support growth and opportunity, and that bringing decisions about transport closer to people is key to improving the transport networks everyone relies on. Currently, both WECA and North Somerset Council act as Local Transport Authorities. Under an expanded Mayoral Combined Authority, WECA would become the Local Transport Authority for the whole area including North Somerset.

WECA plays a vital role in the functioning of the bus network and the decarbonisation of the transport system to reduce the environmental and health impacts of transport.

North Somerset would gain access to the Transport for City Regions (TCR) funding stream. WECA was awarded £752m in 2025 for transport infrastructure spending covering the period 2027-32. Through previous pots of funding, WECA has already led on the delivery of two new railway stations in the region (with several more planned in the years ahead) and has worked collaboratively with North Somerset to begin the process of reopening the Portishead line.

Most active travel projects (such as walking, wheeling, and cycling) would be coordinated at regional level, delivering a range of benefits for people and communities. WECA already has an established working relationship with Active Travel England to increase capability and address to the skills gaps to ensure a consistent approach to safety and accessibility for all transport users, improving the experience of disabled passengers and those with additional needs.



SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

WECA has devolved adult skills funding and functions from the Department for Education. Primarily, this funding is intended to support adults aged 19 and over to participate in education and training, although WECA does work with younger people as well. It is expected that further devolution in skills policy will happen soon, with funding to support disabled people, people with health conditions, and those with complex barriers to work and find a suitable job and sustain work. WECA is one of the pilot areas for schemes like the Youth Guarantee, which is aimed at supporting harder to reach groups.

These funds allow WECA to tailor the training and support for adults in the area to the types of jobs available locally and to local priorities. Working in partnership with the Unitary Authorities, WECA has produced a Get Britain Working Plan for its area, which is focused on reducing economic inactivity and driving greater coordination between national and local health, work, and skills provision in the area.



HOUSING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

The government has committed to delivering 1.5 million new homes this Parliament and sees Mayoral Combined Authorities as integral to meeting that commitment. The Combined Authority is given funding to support regeneration and housing delivery. It has signed a Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England, which brings together their respective strengths and resources in the interests of delivering the housing and infrastructure that the region needs.

There is a great deal of collaboration between WECA and North Somerset in this area already. For example, WECA is currently developing a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) that already incorporates North Somerset and North Somerset are a member of the Strategic Place Partnership. The Spatial Development Strategy will set the overall direction for infrastructure over the long-term, determining the needs of the region in terms of housing and associated infrastructure. It will work alongside Unitary Authority Local Plans, which designate specific sites for development, to ensure a strategic approach that builds the right homes in the right places, supported by good transport links and public services. Full membership of the Combined Authority for North Somerset would likely strengthen these links and partnerships further, as well as simplify the governance arrangements for many of these projects that currently require bespoke governance to take account of the fact that North Somerset is not currently a full member of the Mayoral Combined Authority.



WECA is one of the pilot areas for schemes like the Youth Guarantee.





Mayoral Combined Authorities play a crucial role in attracting investment into their regions.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION

Mayoral Combined Authorities play a crucial role in attracting investment into their regions, supporting businesses to grow and thrive, and creating vibrant places where people want to live and work. To achieve this, WECA delivers a number of programmes that are specifically designed to support business in the region, whether that is new start-ups, businesses looking to scale up and grow, or those that are already established and contributing significant benefits to the area. WECA hosts a Growth Hub, which is part of a national Business Growth Service but can tailor its support programmes to the needs and priorities of the region.

Currently, businesses and organisations based in North Somerset are not able to access much of this funding, as it is designated specifically for companies within the existing Combined Authority area. Full membership of WECA would allow for participation in these schemes, with North Somerset businesses benefiting fully from the opportunities and support that Growth Hub and other WECA services provide. This support covers a number of sectors that are of strategic importance to the region, including advanced manufacturing, digital and technologies, creative and cultural, and clean energy industries.



HEALTH, WELLBEING, AND PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM

The government believes that Mayoral Combined Authorities have a key role to play in improving health and wellbeing alongside wider public service reform. It has given them a bespoke duty to take into account the need to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities when exercising their powers and functions. By working with other local leaders, WECA will bring together local partners to work together on reforming, and driving improvements, in public services. This includes a key role for Mayors in NHS Integrated Care Partnerships, for example.

As this role for Mayoral Combined Authorities in this area becomes more developed, full membership of the Combined Authority for North Somerset will ensure the needs of its communities and the voice of its local leaders are formally included in the decision-making processes around health, wellbeing, and public service reform.



PUBLIC SAFETY

Mayoral Combined Authorities have an important role to play in ensuring public safety within their regions. The government believes that this should complement the role that local councils already play in this area. With the proposed abolition of Police & Crime Commissioners (PCCs), it is anticipated that mayoral responsibilities in this area will continue to grow. Full membership of the Mayoral Combined Authority would allow greater influence for North Somerset in this important area.



ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The West of England is a key delivery partner in the government's ambition to make Britain a clean energy superpower. WECA is already leading on a number of projects that support the decarbonisation of the energy supply, the regional transport network, and the region's homes and businesses. From the delivery of hundreds of new electric buses to the setting up of a dedicated Retrofit advice and business support service, the impact of this agenda is already being felt across the region. As with the other policy areas, full membership of the Combined Authority would allow North Somerset to benefit from participation in many of these schemes, as well as have influence in the overall strategic direction of the region's environment and nature work.

ESTABLISHED MAYORAL STATUS

WECA is currently working towards achieving Established Mayoral Strategic Authority status, which is a deeper level of devolution. If it achieved this status, it would receive the additional powers available at this level, for example, an Integrated Settlement, which would provide much greater flexibility in how it invests its funding, tailoring them even more to local needs and priorities. As a full member of the Mayoral Combined Authority, North Somerset would benefit from the enhanced powers and funding flexibility that would come with Established status.

MAYORAL ELECTIONS

North Somerset becoming a full member of WECA would mean the population of North Somerset Council area being eligible to vote for the Mayor of the West of England. Elections are held every four years, with the next election scheduled for May 2029. The Mayor leads the Mayoral Combined Authority and provides political direction and leadership on all the policy areas set out above.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

There are currently governance arrangements in place that take account of the collaboration that exists between WECA and North Somerset Council. There is a Joint Committee, which includes North Somerset, and the WECA Committee, which excludes North Somerset. Although those two Committee meetings take place concurrently, and representatives from North Somerset are present and able to contribute throughout both meetings, this arrangement leads to complexities in governance, for example, where North Somerset can vote on issues related to Joint Committee matters but not WECA matters. The current arrangement weakens the voice of North Somerset in important decision making that affects the economic prosperity and public services of the region.

The proposal to expand WECA, coupled with the election of a new Mayor in 2025, provides an opportunity to refresh and streamline these governance arrangements. It is proposed that, in the event of North Somerset joining the Combined Authority, the Joint Committee would be dissolved and a single WECA Committee established comprising of the Mayor and the Leader or nominated representative of each of the four constituent authorities.

Decisions would then be taken in line with the voting arrangements set out in the WECA Constitution and in line with current legislation. If those arrangements change as a result of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, voting arrangements will be in line with new legislation.

The expanded WECA would be accountable to its residents through its directly elected Mayor and representatives of the constituent authorities. It would have its own Scrutiny and Audit Committees, as WECA already does. These arrangements ensure that the Combined Authority is fully transparent and properly held to account for its decisions. Residents are able to contribute to the Committee process, through the Questions and Statements process, as well as contacting the Mayor and their local council leaders directly.

WHAT WILL THIS MEAN FOR FUNDING TO NORTH SOMERSET AND THE EXISTING WECA AREA

Most funding secured and invested by WECA is in the form of individual grants and government funding streams, such as the £752m recently awarded as part of the Transport for the City Regions fund. WECA also has access to a £30m a year Investment Fund as part of its original devolution deal. North Somerset joining would allow it full access to all future funding streams that WECA deploys and a one-off investment of £15m has been agreed to support the funding of local projects. North Somerset joining would allow it full access to the various funding streams that WECA deploys and a one-off investment of £15m has been agreed to support the funding of local projects. Should expansion be agreed, all future funding allocations to the West of England would take account of the expanded geography, bringing larger amounts of funding to the region – including the Integrated Settlement once WECA is eligible to take this funding on. Should North Somerset Council join WECA, members will discuss and agree how any funding allocated prior to expansion will be deployed.

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QUESTIONS

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

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

1a. And why do you say that?

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

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

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

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Don't know

- What best describes your response?
 - I am a member of the public, giving views as an individual
 - I am responding on behalf of, or as a representative, of a business organisation
 If the latter, please name organisation:

- Please give the full postcode of where you live or where the organisation you are representing is based.

- What is your sex?
 - Female Male Prefer not to say
 Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex at birth?
 - Yes No Prefer not to say

If 'no', please describe gender identity:

- What is your age group?
 - Under 18 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64
 - 65-74 75+ prefer not to say

- What is your ethnic group?
 - White Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups
 - Asian or Asian British Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
 - Other ethnic group Prefer not to say

- Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?
 - Yes No

If 'Yes', do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

- Yes – a lot Yes – a little Not at all

- Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
 - Heterosexual/Straight Gay/Lesbian Bisexual
 - prefer not to say other– please write below

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Your privacy is important to us, and we take great care to protect it.

The information you give us as part of this consultation will be protected in accordance with our organisational privacy notice, which can be found at: www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/north-somerset-consultation-privacy-notice

If you have any questions about this, you can contact us on 0117 428 6210 or email info@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

