

Lancashire Combined County Authority

**Devolution Deal Consultation
Summary Report – Executive Summary**

March 2024



LANCASHIRE
THE TIME IS NOW



1 Executive Summary

The full version of this report can be accessed at www.lancashiredevolution.co.uk

1.1 Background

On 22 November 2023, the government announced the potential for a devolution deal for Lancashire. The three upper tier councils in Lancashire, (Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council) produced a draft proposal (the 'Proposal') and agreed to consult on plans to create a new entity called the Lancashire Combined County Authority (LCCA).

If the proposal is implemented, existing funding and powers would move from central government to Lancashire, with further powers also being available to the LCCA. It is intended that this would enable local voices to play a greater role in decision-making in the area to secure more investment and deliver better outcomes for local communities. The proposal would not mean removing or merging local councils. Each council would continue to exist and would still be responsible for public services in their area.

The proposal focuses on eight priorities: Innovation, Trade and Investment, Skills, Transport, Net Zero and Climate Change, Digital and Cyber, Culture and Tourism, Housing and Land, and Delivering Our Ambitions. The three upper tier councils in Lancashire are proposing devolution due to what they believe would have a number of benefits. However, before a final decision is reached, the councils have a statutory duty to consult with individuals and organisations both within Lancashire and beyond.

1.2 The public consultation

A public consultation was launched on 1 December 2023 to obtain feedback on the proposal. The consultation ran for eight weeks, closing on 26 January 2024.

Anyone could provide a response to the consultation. Consultees could provide their views via an online or paper questionnaire, by email and post. An online consultation website¹ was established by Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Council. It included a summary of the devolution deal, a copy of the proposal, and what it would mean if it were adopted, the likely benefits and an explanation about how the proposed deal has built on the believed pre-existing strengths of the proposed LCCA area. The independent research agency Ipsos was commissioned to receive responses, and to provide an independent report of the feedback received.

1.3 Responses received

Overall, there were 1,881 responses received within the consultation period. This included responses from 1,695 individuals and 186 organisations and representative groups. Most of those who took part in

¹ <https://lancashiredevolution.co.uk/>

the consultation used the online response form/questionnaire (1,796). There were also 34 responses received on a paper response form/questionnaire, and 51 responses by email.

1.4 Headline findings

Those who participated in the consultation via the online or paper response form were asked to indicate if agreed or disagreed with each of the eight priority areas being consulted on. The following table provides a summary breakdown of responses to the closed or tick-box questions on the response form. As is shown, more consultees agreed than disagreed with each of the eight proposals.

Q. To what extent to you agree or disagree with the proposal on (PRIORITY) for the Lancashire Combined County Authority?					
Priority	Number of consultees*	Agree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Don't know
Innovation, Trade and Investment	1,814	59%	29%	11%	1%
Skills	1,815	64%	25%	10%	1%
Transport	1,816	62%	27%	10%	1%
Net Zero and Climate Change	1,816	56%	28%	15%	1%
Digital and Cyber	1,819	59%	25%	14%	1%
Culture and Tourism	1,816	59%	25%	14%	1%
Housing and Land	1,817	50%	35%	13%	2%
Delivering Our Ambitions	1,819	51%	32%	15%	2%

**This is the number of consultees who answered each of the eight closed questions on the response form. Consultees could choose to skip a question if they wished to and so the number answering each question differs slightly.*

1.5 Qualitative feedback received on the overall proposal

Those who completed a response form were given the opportunity to provide their comments, including reasons for their agreement or disagreement with the overall proposal and eight priority areas. They could also make suggestions or provide other comments about the proposal. Additionally, those who responded by email were able to provide their feedback to be taken into consideration before a decision is taken on the next steps by the three upper tier authorities in Lancashire.

Reasons to agree or support the proposal

Many different reasons were put forward in support of, or agreement with, the proposed LCCA and its potential to stimulate local economic growth and provide new opportunities. For some consultees, the stated benefits of devolution for Lancashire were too significant to be missed, while for others, it was a

positive first step on what was anticipated as an ambitious devolution journey for Lancashire. It was suggested that the newly formed LCCA could address current and important issues, including austerity, lack of lobbying power with central government, and the decline of post-industrial towns in the county. The proposal was also viewed as a pragmatic approach, putting residents' interests first, and attracting investment. Some of those who were supportive expressed excitement over the potential impact on, for example, the local visitor economy and the possibility of partnership working across culture, heritage, sport, and communities. It was also believed that the LCCA could bring decision-making closer to local communities, improve accountability, and the better targeting of resources. For some consultees, there was also potential for growth in Lancashire's manufacturing sector. It was considered that a combined authority would be better positioned to take advantage of such opportunities.

Concerns and issues raised

However, not all of those who provided feedback were supportive of the proposal, with a number of concerns raised. One key concern was about how the proposed LCCA could create an additional layer of local government, with high running and administration costs. For some of those who provided their comments, the proposed LCCA was felt unnecessary. Other key concerns raised included a view that the proposed LCCA had potential to disadvantage some districts and rural areas in Lancashire. A number of consultees had reservations, including about insignificant investment, and that for example, the removal of control over the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) from district councils could lead to what was believed to be a potentially unfair allocation of funds. Other concerns included that the proposal could lead to more centralised decision-making, and thereby weakening the influence of district councils. To this effect it was felt that district councils were more effective in understanding and representing their local communities. Some of those who provided their feedback also believed that the LCCA could result in poor or reduced service provision in some areas, as well as reduced opportunities and weakened democratic accountability. In particular, there was a concern about the proposed governance and delivery arrangements, with some areas potentially having less of a voice and less of a say over important local issues. District councils and parish councils in Lancashire were particularly concerned about governance, and the proposed delivery arrangements.

Suggestions and other comments

Many of those who provided their comments and feedback made suggestions about the proposal. A wide range of suggestions were made including that small businesses and SMEs should be prioritised, that certain sectors including the voluntary and community sector needed to have more consideration, that the councils advocating for the LCCA should ensure they bring in and involve expertise to include, for example, a strong business voice. It was also suggested that there should be more emphasis and focus on children's education, social care, and increased investment in public transport and transport infrastructure more generally. Others still suggested more focus on affordable housing, as well as the creation of more and higher paying job opportunities for young people, to upskill local people, and to prevent a *skills drain* to other parts of the country.

Some of those who provided their feedback requested more information, detail and clarity on what was proposed. It was felt by some that not enough information was provided, while for others what was proposed was too theoretical, and that more substance was needed about how the new LCCA would operate and deliver on its priorities.

Conclusion

Analysis of the responses received to the consultation both through the completed response form and from emailed responses demonstrates a broad support for the proposed devolution. Analysis of the responses also showed support for the proposal from businesses in Lancashire. This is reflected in each of the eight thematic areas set out in the consultation, as well as in the comments received. The consultation responses have also highlighted a number of areas that will require consideration if the proposed devolution proposal were to proceed.

As evidence that more consultees agree than disagree with the proposal, net agreement from those who completed a response form is positive for each of the priority areas consulted on. A net score is the percentage of those who agree minus the percentage of those who disagree. For the eight priority areas this is as follows:

- Innovation, Trade and Investment: 59% agreed with the proposals for Innovation, Trade and Investment, compared to 29% disagreeing (+30).
- Skills: 64% agreed with the proposals for Skills, compared to 25% disagreeing (+39).
- Transport: 62% agreed with the proposals for Transport, compared to 27% disagreeing (+35).
- Net Zero and Climate Change: 56% agreed with the proposals for Net zero and climate change, compared to 28% disagreeing (+28).
- Digital and Cyber: 59% agreed with the proposals for Digital and cyber, compared to 25% disagreeing (+34).
- Culture and Tourism: 59% agreed with the proposals for Culture and tourism, compared to 25% disagreeing (+34).
- Housing and Land: 50% agreed with the proposals for Housing and land, compared to 35% disagreeing (+15).
- Delivering Our Ambitions: 51% agreed with the proposals for Delivering our ambitions, compared to 32% disagreeing (+19)

The public consultation has therefore provided an opportunity for individuals and organisations to express their opinions on the proposal for a level 2 devolution in Lancashire. Participants were able to indicate their agreement or disagreement and provide justifications for their views. This report contains both supportive and opposing feedback on different aspects of the proposal.

The next steps will be decided after the county and two unitary authorities in Lancashire have reviewed and considered the responses to the consultation.

