

The Devolution Challenge to Governance

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The vision for a combined authority with devolved powers must be solidly built on a shared purpose that fully reflects both the diversity of the region and an unwavering commitment to wellbeing for all citizens.

The new authority has the opportunity to make growth both sustainable and meaningful, by ensuring that wellbeing and equalities are used as the driving factors when designing new economic solutions and more effective community action.

The new governance model should create a mission that has at its heart joined up wellbeing and economic policies. This would allow Merseyside to become known not just for its culture, heritage and creativity, but as the place where families want to live because we have eliminated health inequalities and postcode lottery's in public services. Successful collaboration will mix universal provision with the bespoke strengths that localities provide.

As growth and business development is targeted, it should be joined up with initiatives that reach into the NHS to work collaboratively with public health and the CCGs. This will enable our children to grow up healthy, literate and able to engage in STEM education and apprenticeships that can drive the economy.

The leaders of our near future must necessarily be true statesmen who are able to work together from a position of trust and who can commit to working for the good of all, not just for a locality or neighbourhood. To accomplish this the governance will need to be soundly based on a “new deal” that includes the abandonment of “business as usual “. Primarily the leadership must be bold enough to move away from the political drivers of short-term financial planning and output /target driven cultures.

There must be shared vision /purpose and values that will enable the creation of necessary trusting relationships, as well as a firm public commitment to “fairness” and shared responsibility. This will ensure that the leadership is able to deal with conflicts of interest as well as enabling them to be sure that shared principles, such as Nolan’s, actually are *lived*. Principled leadership is necessary in order to ensure that decision making frameworks are led by shared concern for both the greater good and the protection of the most vulnerable.

Skilling up local councillors to take part in larger strategic discussions and bringing in outside expertise as needed are cost effective mechanisms to inform more sophisticated strategy as well as to improve shared decision making.

The new leadership must not be afraid of communities who “speak truth to power “, share good practice and engage in lobbying. This is fundamental not just to democracy but to enable systemic change.

Real community engagement is messy and is not produced from traditional risk adverse local authority models. Innovation hubs that prototype solutions and create new ideas can evolve if an appetite for risk is developed. Learning led initiatives that are not defined as failures but as intelligence seeking ventures could become a bedrock to reform public services. The catalysts for change that the new authority will be seeking, can very easily come from those very communities that they are elected to serve.

In the end, the devolution agenda could only serve to make Merseyside an even better place to live, work and play, *if* the leadership is brave enough to use this opportunity to deliver differently.