Liverpool’s Elected Mayor 2012-16: An Independent Assessment

Professor Michael Parkinson CBE
‘Joe played a pioneering role in delivering devolution in this country. He was the first of the big city leaders to seize the opportunity of an elected mayor.’

Michael Heseltine
 CHAPTER 1.
WHAT DOES THIS REPORT DO?

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1.1 Liverpool residents elected a Mayor for a four-year term in May 2012. They re-elected the same Mayor – Joe Anderson – in May 2016. It is a good time to take stock of the contribution the office has made to developments in Liverpool in the past four years. This report attempts to do this, building upon an initial review of the early years of the elected Mayor carried out by the Heseltine Institute. It reflects upon the past but looks to the future. It assesses the role, reputation and impact of the Mayor since 2012. It looks at the extent to which the Mayor delivered the electoral pledges he made in 2012. It looks briefly at his performance on a number of quantitative pledges. But it is primarily concerned to explore the more qualitative, soft power dimensions of the Mayor’s role and how it differs from a traditional city council leader. Identifying that difference is one of the key tasks of this report. In view of the importance of the devolution agreement between national government and Liverpool City Region, the report ends with some key messages for a city region wide Metro Mayor who will be elected as part of that agreement in May 2017.

1.2 The report is based upon extensive interviews with over 50 key partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors in Liverpool. They are drawn from all sectors of its economy – manufacturing, logistics, finance, education, retail, tourism, professional services. The report assesses their views of the way in which the Mayor used his soft power to lead the city of Liverpool during the past four years and the implications for the future. They are a powerful and important set of voices. But we recognise that there will be other wider voices from outside the LCR ‘establishment’ that also need to be considered. The interviewees are identified in the Appendix. Since the interviews were on a Chatham House basis, authors of the quotes are not identified. The exception is where we have identified quotes from the Mayor, since he clearly could not be anonymised.

1.3 The rest of this report is structured in six parts. Section 2 outlines what key partners originally expected of an elected Mayor as opposed to a leader of a council. Section 3 reviews the evidence about the Mayor’s performance against the specific quantitative pledges he made when running for office in 2012 – houses, schools and jobs. Section 4 identifies what key partners think has been the added value of the Mayor. Section 5 discusses what partners think might have been done differently. Section 6 identifies the factors which either helped or hindered the Mayor. Section 7 identifies some key messages for the proposed Metro Mayor. One simple, key message of the report is that the Mayor has delivered on many of the expectations of many senior partners across Liverpool and that an elected Mayor is different from a traditional council leader. The Mayor could have done some things differently. But the experience has increased partners’ appetite and support for an elected Metro Mayor. The challenge for that Metro Mayor was always going to be great. But Brexit and the uncertainty it has created, means the challenge will be even greater. But the need for wise city regional leadership will equally be greater. The opportunity is compelling.
Making Liverpool punch its weight

2.2 However despite such differences, partners shared similar expectations about what the office would bring. They expected and wanted an elected Mayor to bring more to the party than a traditional council leader. The primary expectation was that an elected Mayor would make sure Liverpool would punch its weight more in future. There was a widespread belief that the city was not sufficiently high on the radar of the private sector, international markets, the media or national government. In this view Liverpool suffered in comparison with other cities, which probably had fewer assets and achievements but definitely had done more to promote their cause with those audiences.

“I wanted someone who would promote the growth of business development. Someone who could bring in and rally important people and who was big enough and strategic enough to wave all the flags. I wanted someone of global standing.”

Private sector leader

2.3 The clear hope was that an elected Mayor would mobilise people and resources to make Liverpool a weightier player in national and international debates and markets. How did partners believe that would be achieved?

Increased leadership

2.4 There was a general view that Liverpool had suffered from a lack of clear, coherent decisive leadership in the past. Everybody argued that a Mayor would fill that leadership gap. ‘I was looking for a figurehead, a respected pragmatist with the characteristics of a leader.’

Private sector leader

2.5 Greater accountability to government and voters.

The government was clearly hoping that having an elected Mayor would mean that the voters would know who was responsible for decisions locally – and could be held to account. But equally government wanted to be reassured that it would have a single person accountable to them for the use of national resources.

One of the traditional concerns of national governments of all political persuasions is that local government does not do enough with the resources it gets from government – but that government itself is then held accountable for local shortcomings by the national voters. If hoped an elected Mayor would give them someone they could trust to achieve national goals and priorities as well as local ambitions. Partners also hoped and expected that an elected Mayor would be more visible and accountable to Liverpool voters.

Single voice

2.6 It was also expected that a Mayor would provide a single voice for the city instead of the plethora of voices that exist to represent Liverpool.

“I wanted one person to be able to speak to government and business.”

Economic development organisation leader

2.7 Partners expected the Mayor would concentrate upon the key strategic challenges facing the city in future as opposed to the operational issues of city council affairs like social services, environment, and transport.

“I wanted greater focus on the strategic challenges facing the city.”

Private sector leader

Focus on strategic challenges

2.7 Partners expected the Mayor would concentrate upon the key strategic challenges and opportunities facing the city in future as opposed to the operational issues of city council affairs like social services, environment, and transport.

“I wanted greater focus on the strategic challenges facing the city.”

Private sector leader

Greater clarity about the city’s economic future.

2.8 They also expected that a Mayor would provide a clearer economic narrative about the future of Liverpool which people could mobilise around. Many things had been achieved in the city recently. But partners felt there was a need for a single compelling story which could unite different partners, sectors and organisations.
Higher national and international profile

2.9 There was an expectation that an elected Mayor would be more visible and in turn make Liverpool more visible at national and international levels. Liverpool would be seen and heard more in high places at home and abroad. The office would be a marketing tool for Liverpool.

Better relationships with national government

2.10 Since an elected Mayor was effectively a condition of the City Deal with government in 2012, people expected that it would improve Liverpool’s relationship with national government. In previous decades the city had not had good relationships with government for a variety of political reasons. Although the relationship had been improving in the recent past, there was real hope that a Mayor would do more to help bridge that historic gap. Many partners hoped that the city would get easier access to, preferential treatment by and more money from government. If it did not get any extra new money, they expected at least greater control over existing money.

Less concern for party politics – more for the city

2.11 Partners also expected and hoped that a Mayor would raise the tone and level of the debate beyond partisan politics and focus on the long term interests of the city rather than those of his own political party.

‘I was expecting someone who was more concerned with the place than with his party.’

Policy analyst

‘I expected a new dawn. I expected a new way of doing politics. I expected not the city council way of doing things but differently. I expected more freedom, I expected better communication. I expected greater hope for the city.’

Policy analyst

Joined up governance

2.12 There was an expectation that an elected Mayor would be able to mobilise and orchestrate the different agencies and organisations inside and outside the city council and encourage them to pull in the same direction.

‘I was looking for someone who could connect the parts – not a talented soloist but a complex orchestrator.’

Policy analyst

‘I thought the Mayor would encourage city-wide working as opposed to working in silos.’

Economic development organisation leader

More innovation, speedier decision making, better delivery from the city council

2.13 Many partners hoped and expected that a Mayor would improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the council making it more innovative, quicker in its decision making and better at delivery.

The balance sheet on initial expectations.

2.14 The overall expectations can be best summarised by one player who has been involved in a huge range of initiatives and organisations in the city over twenty years.

‘I expected four things from an elected Mayor: A clear reference point – take me to your leader! Speedier decision making. A more pronounced ability to determine priorities. A chief Barker with external partners.’

Ex public sector leader

What did the Mayor expect in 2012?

2.15 The Mayor shared many of partners’ expectations in 2012. But his primary concern was to convince people that the elected Mayor model would actually benefit the city and businesses.

‘I wanted to raise expectations about what an elected Mayor could achieve. I was determined to make the case by putting myself up for election as the most powerful person elected by the whole city. I wanted to show the model would deliver.’

The Mayor

2.15 We next turn to see the extent to which partners hopes and expectations were fulfilled. We start with the specific quantitative pledges the Mayor made in 2012.
3.1 The Mayor ran on five main pledges in 2012. They were to build new schools, create new jobs, create new homes, make the city greener and make it more business friendly. The first three were the key quantitative targets. How many of them did he achieve? We have not undertaken an independent assessment of the Mayor’s record. Instead we have drawn upon the report by the City Council which undertook a detailed analysis of those targets and performance. We have reviewed that report and believe its assessment of the quantitative achievements are robust and reliable.

3.2 In education, the Mayor pledged to build 12 new schools through a Liverpool Schools Investment Plan designed to provide a high quality school environment across the city including a refurbishment programme. On housing, the Mayor pledged to build 5,000 new homes, bring 1,000 empty homes back into use and develop a £3m scheme to provide mortgage deposits for first time buyers. In employment, the Mayor pledged to create 20,000 new jobs by: creating thousands of end user jobs through major developments; supporting business growth, entrepreneurs and start-ups; attracting visitors and tourists; creating 17,000 jobs in construction and the wider supply chain through the schools and homes building programmes and major developments at Edge Lane, Great Homer Street, and the Exhibition Centre at Kings Waterfront.

3.3 The evidence is that the Mayor achieved or exceeded those quantitative targets during his four years in office. The Liverpool Schools Investment Plan is on track to deliver a £170m capital investment programme between 2012 and 2017, and support an estimated 1,921 construction jobs. 11 of the 12 new schools have already opened: Notre Dame; Archbishop Beck; St John Bosco; Millstead; Holly Lodge; Bankview; New Park; Northway; St Hilda’s; Archbishop Blanch and SFX.

3.4 The Housing Delivery Plan delivered 5,045 new homes during the Mayoral term. 67% of the new homes were for sale, 25% for social or affordable rent and 4% each for shared ownership and market rent. 3,256 empty homes were brought back into use.

3.5 Overall, the 20,000 jobs pledge will be surpassed. This involved 13,490 end user jobs created/supported from Mayoral Investment Fund (2,121), Liverpool Vision (9,509), and Regeneration Major Developments (1,860). It also involved 17,523 construction jobs from the Housing Delivery Plan (9,536 jobs), Empty Homes programmes (1,167), Schools Investment Programme (1,790 jobs) and Regeneration Major Developments (5,030).

3.6 So the evidence is that Mayor met or exceeded his quantitative targets. This is a major achievement given the scale of austerity and the resource cuts to Liverpool local authority.
4.2 It is also simpler to judge the quantitative achievements of the elected Mayor – what he has brought to the Liverpool party. In fact, this is not as simple as it might seem. First, many things have happened in and to the city during the past four years. No one can be certain whether they would or would not have happened if there had not been an elected Mayor. In other words, it is difficult to demonstrate how much change for good or ill has been directly caused by the Mayor. It is not a case of ‘post hoc, ergo propter hoc.’ Second, the Mayor has been Mayor of the city but also the leader of the largest party on the city council. So it is not always clear when partners assess the Mayor the extent to which the credit should be attributed to the city council or to the office of the Mayor. Third, it is very difficult to separate the office of the Mayor from the personality of the particular individual holding the position. Mayors of big cities typically attract big candidates whether it is Ken Livingston, Boris Johnston or indeed Joe Anderson. So separating what the individual delivered as opposed to what the office did is not simple.

4.1 Meeting his quantitative targets was an important achievement for the Mayor. But as we saw earlier, partners were also interested in his use of the soft powers of the office. So this section assesses partners’ judgement of the added value of an elected Mayor – what he has brought to the Liverpool party. In fact, this is not as simple as it might seem. First, many things have happened in and to the city during the past four years. No one can be certain whether they would or would not have happened if there had not been an elected Mayor. In other words, it is difficult to demonstrate how much change for good or ill has been directly caused by the Mayor. It is not a case of ‘post hoc, ergo propter hoc.’ Second, the Mayor has been Mayor of the city but also the leader of the largest party on the city council. So it is not always clear when partners assess the Mayor the extent to which the credit should be attributed to the city council or to the office of the Mayor. Third, it is very difficult to separate the office of the Mayor from the personality of the particular individual holding the position. Mayors of big cities typically attract big candidates whether it is Ken Livingston, Boris Johnston or indeed Joe Anderson. So separating what the individual delivered as opposed to what the office did is not simple.

The big picture – the Mayor is a success

4.3 The big picture is that key partners believe that the elected Mayor has been a success. Some partners were initially sceptical of the potential value of an elected Mayor. Some thought the costs outweighed the benefits and did not want the initiative anyway. Others did not believe it would work and add value. But most if not all sceptics have been convinced. Initial supporters of the idea have had their hopes confirmed. There is huge goodwill and support for the office of elected Mayor. As important, there is huge goodwill and support for the individual himself, Joe Anderson. Virtually everyone wants the Mayor to succeed. Private sector partners are especially committed to the idea of a Mayor. Virtually everyone wish it to continue and also think it is a good idea to extend it to the Liverpool city region. Indeed, as we shall see, many believe that the office would work even better at the city region level where there are more strategic and fewer operational issues to be addressed.

“I did not have high expectations given the power base of politics and its previous failures. I think he has done the best of what is possible to do in Liverpool.”

National city organisation leader.

4.4 The majority believe that the Mayor has a different role and greater reach than a city council leader. They believe a Mayor has a bigger agenda. He can do things quickly. He can deal with more external partners. He can do deals with the private sector.

“The Mayor has brought authority that a council leader could not have done. He has demonstrated the value of the principle of elected Mayor.”

North West business association leader.

“The Mayor has a wider agenda than a council leader. The key change is that more external organisations want to negotiate with the Mayor.”

LCC Councillor

“Councillors and council leaders will always focus on local issues. A Mayor can take a wider perspective. He can also be more pragmatic and do better deals with the private sector.”

LCC Councillor

4.5 “Most organisations are risk averse. The Mayor can tackle that and unblock things. But of course we have to get the balance right between making changes and making the right kind of decisions.”

LCC Councillor

The mood music in the city is better

Key partners are far more optimistic about the performance and prospects of Liverpool than has been the case in past years. They also believe that the mood of the city itself and attitudes towards Liverpool by outsiders are more positive. Everyone agreed it is difficult to clearly allocate responsibility for this improvement to the Mayor alone. But virtually everyone agreed the Mayor should be given credit for the more positive mood music.

“There is no doubt the mood in Liverpool is far better than it was. And although difficult to prove it was created by the Mayor, I am inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.”

Private sector leader

“Because of his style Liverpool is now seen as a can do city. Everyone see it as the model.”

Economic development organisation leader
Liverpool's profile is higher

4.6 Everyone is clear that the profile of the city is much higher than it was four years ago. And everyone gives a substantial part of the credit for that to the Mayor.

‘We have better profiling of the city nationally and internationally.’

Private sector leader

‘Wherever you look in the trade press you will see Liverpool and the Mayor mentioned. He is seen to represent Liverpool at national and international events. He is visible and made the city much more so.’

Local authority official

‘He did a terrific job of making a very big splash in terms of Liverpool’s City Deal.’

National city organisation leader.

‘I was amazed when I went to a big Paris conference just after being elected and the Minister said to me “Joe you are the star here, the first elected big city Mayor outside London. Everybody wants to meet and hear you”.’

The Mayor.

4.7 All partners agree that the Mayor has shown leadership – nationally and internationally.

‘The Mayor has influenced people far more than a council leader could. You just need to look at the attitudes of business at say MIPIM. They know he can and does take decisions and delivers.’

Local authority officer

‘He is recognisable. He can lead. He represents us well. He is not liked by all but he is liked and respected by most.’

Economic development leader.

Financial innovation

4.9 Everyone agrees that the Mayor and his office had showed a lot of commitment and had success in exploring ways of raising money in difficult times. His office has been very active in trying to develop more systematic ways of mobilising and packaging sources of money, as opposed to simply chasing individual pots. There is much further to go in this area as we shall argue when looking at the city region. But the Mayoral Investment Fund has developed and funded a number of projects. The scheme itself won a national prize for innovation in local government.

Prestige projects

4.10 It is universally agreed that one of the hallmarks of the Mayor has been his willingness and ability to deliver prestige projects which attract people, attention and investment to the city. A crucial one was the International Festival for Business which was part of the 2012 City Deal. It was successfully delivered in 2014 and brought great attention to the city and was repeated with government support in 2015 and will be subsequently. The Mayor encouraged the attraction of the major festivals of the Giants which were huge cultural and financial successes, bringing visitors, resources and attention to the city in 2012 and 2014. The 3 Queens events in 2015 brought similar attention, visibility, kudos and money to Liverpool with one million people lining the Mersey to watch, generating £30m in economic impact. The Mayor led the campaign to get cruise liners into Liverpool and provided a terminal for them – with plans for a bigger new one in the pipeline. He pressed the case for HS2 to come to Liverpool and made the prospect of success greater. He used his Mayoral Investment Fund to build the new Exhibition Centre and hotel next to the Convention Centre and Arena. In different ways they raised the city’s profile, visibility, reputation and income.

The city has clearly been very good at the big events – the Giants, the International Festival of Business.’

Private sector leader

‘We would not have got HS2 up the agenda if it was not for Joe.’

Local authority officer

‘The big events have been a huge success.’

Local authority officer

‘Joe is a spectacle man. He likes the big events, the Giants. The IFB is right up his street.’

Economic development leader

Devolution, city region, Combined Authority

4.11 The Mayor played a significant role in achieving devolution. The path to devolution was not straightforward and there were some tensions between the local authorities, their elected leaders and private sector partners along the way. It certainly was not all sweetness and light. But all agree that the Mayor genuinely believed in the city region concept, was instrumental in bringing people along with the agenda and in persuading government that the city region could be trusted to deliver for a devolution deal.

‘He played a pioneering role in delivering devolution in this country. He was the first of the big city leaders to seize the opportunity of an elected mayor.’

Michael Heseltine

‘Despite the shortcomings we would not have got there without the Mayor.’

Private sector leader.

‘He has advanced the cause of devolution. Behind the scenes, CLG and Treasury have a high regard for the Mayor. The Dero door was opened by his presence.’

Civil servant

The Mayor himself agrees on the importance of devolution and the opportunity it would give Liverpool and the other large northern cities to make a greater contribution to the national economy.

‘I have argued the devolution case for over a decade. When Labour was in power they would never let go. We might be bludgeoned by the Tories, but with devolution we can shape our own destiny. We can train for local employers’ needs. We can improve welfare to work.’

The Mayor.

Managing the cuts

4.12 The Mayor was in the difficult position of wishing to cooperate with the government in its Northern Powerhouse, devolution and city region agenda but at the same time having to manage significant cuts in national government resources to Liverpool. This presented huge challenges to him, the city council and its officers. He had to walk a tightrope between making clear the scale of cuts was anathema to him but not to return the failed policies of the 1980s and threatening protests or even bankruptcy. The view is that he has done a good job in that tricky area.

‘The Mayor did a good job of making clear the government’s cuts were not his preferences and choice – but making them work as painlessly as possible.’

Private sector leader.

4.13 Others felt that the Mayor – and the city – had perhaps not quite got the balance right.

‘It sometimes feels the two agendas of economic competitiveness and social inclusion are separate tracks in Liverpool. You hear the social justice argument without hearing the connection made to competitiveness. It is not exactly a begging bowl but government would be more sympathetic to an argument that would show how changes would lead to their goal of increased productivity. Manchester and other cities have been slightly better at presenting that argument.’

National city organisation leader.

4.14 However, it also has to be recognised that the scale of cuts to Liverpool were greater than to other cities including Core Cities. So the Mayor was well within his rights to take a firm line. In fact the Mayor believed that managing the cuts and keeping the city council show on the road was his most significant achievement – far greater than his soft power achievements or prestige projects.

‘I am most proud of the fact I have been able to promote and champion the city through austerity. It is my biggest achievement. It may not be sexy like the Giants. But to have managed the cuts and still promote the city gives me a huge sense of pride.’

The Mayor.
4.15 He also argued that he had to make austerity a key focus.
Austerity was not simply a loss of resources but a barrier to doing things better or more efficiently in the longer term.

‘The short term strategy was to manage the cuts. The long term ambition is to make the city sustainable – not only in a green sense but financially. We have lost a lot already and will lose even more 2020. That is why we have invested to earn. We borrow to show we are confident enough to invest in infrastructure and that we can deliver. We put our money where our mouth is.’

The Mayor

Innovation

4.16 Many partners hoped that a Mayor would adopt innovative and imaginative ideas and practices. There is agreement the Mayor had been imaginative in setting up his Mayoral Commissions on five big themes – Europe, Fairness, Education, Health, Creativity. It was agreed that they had: identified big issues facing the city; brought in good people as chairs and members, produced a range of good ideas and increased the capacity of the city council to address issues as it experienced resource cuts and loss of staff. In terms of bringing new ideas, people and concerns the Commission were regarded as a success. In particular, the Health Commission brought in really serious people from outside the city and because the Mayor had a personal interest in the topic led to sustained commitment and cooperation between the different health partners.

‘He commissioned people who were not the usual suspects.’

Local authority officer

‘The Health Commission helped. Partly it is the reason we have one of best CCGs across whole country.’

Health leader

‘He has been quite imaginative in setting up the Commissions. They moved the agendas on and brought capacity into the city.’

Policy analyst

Access to and influence with government is better

4.17 Everyone agrees that the Mayor has built very good relationships with Ministers in government and that their view of him and the city is a very positive one.

‘We see Liverpool differently because it has a Mayor. It looks different to us than other cities. We know we can trust him.’

Civil servant

‘The Mayor is much better connected with government. He is on the mobile phone lists of the Treasury, Heseltine, Osborne and O’Neil. A council leader would not have got in the same position.’

Private sector leader

4.18 We can short circuit the process of going through regional officials and get direct access to and decisions from Ministers, for example in speeding up planning decisions.’

Local authority officer

Additional resources

The partners agreed that the Mayor had managed to increase the profile with access to and potentially influence over government. The original City Deal did bring extra powers and resources to the city that would not have come without the Deal. It brought a range of institutional initiatives, Mayoral Development Corporation Development and Zones. However, some argued that the Mayor did not succeed in attracting extra resources to the city because its basic budgets had been so severely cut. There is a variety of responses to that. The most significant is that austerity was a national government strategy and that it was unlikely that any individual city could have avoided significant cuts. The government machine swept everywhere away. Second it was impossible to dispute that the cuts might have been even greater if the Mayor had not developed such a good relationship with government. Third, the cuts began several years before the Mayor took office and were well in train by the time he had done his deal with the government. Finally, government argues that the reward for genuine cooperation is that the city would be treated differently in future under devolution and there would be resources and influence advantages in future. Some argue this is essentially jam tomorrow. But most agree that the case has to be tested in future.

‘I am not sure government kept their side of the bargain and that we got all the extra resources. We need to hold government to account in the next rounds.’

Local authority officer.

The Mayor’s own view of the dilemma was the following.

‘You have to separate the cuts from other issues. I think we should have got only-average not greater cuts – but the view from London was different. I have to talk to government. I have to be the Mayor for the city first and a Labour politician second.’

The Mayor
5.1 We have shown extensive evidence that the majority of senior players think that office of Mayor has been successful. Nevertheless, some felt that some things had not been delivered – or could have been done differently. In this next section we discuss those issues.

**A more strategic approach**

5.2 There is common agreement that the Mayor has delivered a series of important and impressive initiatives. It suits his individual style and personality. However, many argued that in future it would be better if there was a more strategic approach to the interests of the city.

“The Mayor can be impatient in his anxiety to get things done. He is more interested in action than in longer term thinking and planning. That can be strength but it can also be a weakness.”

Local authority officer

**Clearer economic hymn sheet**

5.3 Related to this concern, many argued that they would like to see a clear longer-term economic narrative for the city which identified what were its underlying assets and long-term ambitions in a well-argued case. The State of the Liverpool City Region Report underlined much of this analysis. It is not peculiar to the office of the Mayor. The city and Liverpool city region in general needs to develop longer term business and investment cases and tell a clear simple narrative which can be consistently promted inside and outside the city. Many in the private sector do not feel there is a clear simple hymn sheet which spells out where the city is going and how it expects to get there. Many projects are good – but the bigger story is perhaps not made explicit enough. Again it is difficult to sort out whether this is a function of the Mayor or a feature of the way Liverpool does and always has done politics.
Continuous, coherent, conversation with private sector

5.4 Many in the private sector have argued the Mayoral system has been good at responding to problems and crises. But it is less good at addressing systematically the longer term issues facing their sectors. This point has been made by major players in the retail, logistics, advanced manufacturing, professional services.

‘I can get an immediate meeting to sort out a specific issue. But I want access on longer term issues. I want a continuous, coherent conversation about the strategic interests that affect my business and the city’

Retail sector leader

‘We need more private sector involvement in the decision making processes. We need to look at local departments which directly affect business. Some of those departments are slow and not business friendly. And small firms are not given the same amount of attention. The Mayor needs to pull the strands together around people, place and prosperity.’

Business association leader

‘It feels like the door can only be pushed from one side – ours. In Manchester my Chair talks with the leader and Chief Executive at least once a week. We need more of that.’

North West business leader

Greater policy and political challenge

5.6 One of the general concerns about elected Mayors is whether they are too powerful and whether there is enough challenge in the system to them. This issue was raised in the evaluation of the elected Mayor in Bristol city. This was not a majority concern with our partners. Nevertheless, the issue was raised by some elected politicians and others. Some argued that there has not been enough challenge to the Mayor.

5.7 The Mayor himself would take a different view on these issues.

‘People may say it is undemocratic. But I was directly elected. The Select Committees can scrutinise. No major decision has been taken by me which has not gone through select committee, the Cabinet and full council. There is no difference in accountability to a council leader with Cabinet. I love scrutiny. The more you scrutinise the better. It is crucial you show you deliver on your promises.’

The Mayor

Equally he would challenge the idea that he was a too dominant leader. For example:

‘The way we managed austerity smashed the myth that this is a dictatorship. It could not have been achieved without a whole team delivering on that.’

The Mayor

5.8 This was not a majority concern. And clearly the accountability of the Mayor to partners, administrators, government and the voters is a complex one. That said, the strongest view was that partners were glad that the Mayor had showed the leadership which had been lacking in the past in Liverpool.
First what helped him?

6.1 Before discussing constraints on the Mayor, it is important to emphasise one of his acknowledged key assets. There is significant agreement that his personality and passion considerably helped his ability to deliver. The Mayor is seen to wear his heart on his sleeve and defend both his city and its people. There is considerable admiration for his commitment, passion, enthusiasm, honesty and self-deprecating style. He is seen as a genuine Scouser committed to pursuing his city’s – not his personal – interests.

“He is larger than life. He has definitely grabbed the attention of decision makers for Liverpool. He grabs the headlines for local government. He puts Liverpool in the shop window.”

Local authority leader

“He has been belligerent with government, almost to the point of bullying them. He has a dogmatic determination to make Westminster listen to Liverpool. He goes the extra mile physically and emotionally.”

Private sector leader

Nevertheless, partners identified a series of factors which had constrained the Mayor’s performance which we rehearse below.

Austerity

6.2 Austerity drained both the Mayor’s resources and capacity. It meant that the city council lost senior people just as the Mayoral initiative was being created. Too much time and energy of the Mayor and his remaining senior staff was expended on responding to and managing austerity as opposed to focusing upon longer-term strategic issues. They were sacrificed in the need to manage daily crises and challenges. It also meant there was simply less money to be innovative or even to deliver desirable projects.

“It started at the worst of time. Too much executive capacity was spent on managing the cuts.”

Private sector leader

“We had a big strategic plan. With austerity, the proverbial hit the fan and that’s when the headless chicken syndrome started.”

Local authority official

The size and capacity of the Mayor’s office

6.3 Many partners argued that the Mayor’s office was not big enough and did not contain enough people with the right policy and analytic skills and experience. The office was much smaller than for example that of the London Mayor. Essentially there have been too many issues, too few people, and too little time. There are clear messages for the Metro Mayor’s office.

Mayor for the city and of the city council

6.4 Some partners identified the tensions created by the fact that the Mayor was responsible for longer term strategic interests of the city but was also the leader of the majority party on the city council. This created a variety of issues. Some felt that it was difficult to distinguish between the Mayor, his office and the local authority in terms of who was accountable for what. They wanted more clarity on those relationships.

Some argued that the Mayor was more involved with the details of running the council which he should have left to others so that he could spend more time on the bigger strategic issues. Many argued that such a style would come under pressure when a Mayor operates at a city regional level where clarity, focus and commitment to a city regional agenda would be key.

“The Mayor should delegate more stuff. Not sure if it is his fear of non-delivery or wish to make sure everything is done. But it preoccupies him and limits his ability to prioritise and focus on strategic issues.”

Private sector leader

The Mayor again would take a different view.

“Some said I should have left austerity or the council services alone. But that really constrains our ability to deliver on our bigger picture. They’re part of the same cloth. You can’t artificially distinguish between them.”

The Mayor

Complexities of city regional relationships

6.5 We saw earlier that many partners gave the Mayor great credit for his leadership on the city region and devolution agenda. They believe that he helped to facilitate the whole process with government. However, constructing a consensus between the 6 local authorities and their leaders in the city region was a challenging, slightly fraught process. Such tensions are not uncommon in many of the Core Cities which are coming to terms with new working relationships and models. It presents large cultural challenges. Liverpool was probably better than some other city regions. But the effort to build agreement on the need for a city regional approach did consume a lot of the Mayor’s time and energy. If relationships had already been more collaborative, he would have had more time and energy to focus on Liverpool’s issues.

“The place has changed. We were too fragmented in the past. The Mersey might as well have been the Atlantic Ocean. Squabbling did hold us back. But we now have constant positive discussion about how to work better together.”

The Mayor
LIVERPOOL'S ELECTED MAYOR 2012-16: AN INDEPENDENT ASSESSMENT

7.3 Just as the key task of the Liverpool Mayor was to make the city punch its weight, there is agreement that the key task of a city region Mayor will be to ensure that devolution to the city region delivers. The Metro Mayor will need to be inclusive. They will need to get all the different parts of the region and all the public, private and community sectors engaged. They will need to engender trust in the office as a spokesperson for the whole city region. He or she will also need to gain the confidence of their partners in the north west and nationally. Liverpool city region has come a long way in a short time in developing a consensus between the different local authorities working together on agreed city region priorities. But there is more to be done to deepen that commitment, trust and confidence. It will be critical that the Metro Mayor is seen as above narrow interests and able to speak for and represent the wider interests. Partners want the Mayor to be above party in favour of place. The Metro Mayor will have been elected by the people of Liverpool city region. The local authority leaders will have been indirectly elected by their party groups on the council. They will have different interest and allegiances. The Metro Mayor will have to negotiate all these geographical and political complexities.

"It has got to be someone with a strategic understanding of where we need to be in 20 years’ time and has that vision and ambition to lead the city region."

Local authority leader.

7.4 A key task of the Metro Mayor will be to promote the city region internally and externally. They will need to be the champion for the city region promoting it to national government and international audiences. They will need to persuade the different local authorities, the private sector and the wider public that the city region is a real and powerful entity which will bring greater economic opportunities to all its people and businesses.

"His or her first challenge would be the one I found when I became city Mayor – to win people over to the idea. I am proud of being called too charismatic. It is what is needed."

The Mayor.

Choosing priorities and creating consensus

7.5 The Metro Mayor will also need to help create agreement on the key priorities for the Liverpool city region after 2017. Our partners stressed that the city region did not have a clearly developed long term economic strategy with investment and business cases to develop key assets. The Metro Mayor will need to lead and create such an agreement. They should be able to see the wider interest of the city region, perhaps in contrast to the local authority leaders who will still need to represent the interests of their patch and their people. The Metro Mayor will need to create and promote the bigger economic picture and get the endorsement and buy in of local partners, politicians and places. Everyone agrees that the Mayor will not be free rein or a blank cheque book. This will place a premium upon being able to work collaboratively and persuade colleagues to support his plans.

Concentrating on the strategic issues

7.6 All partners agree the Metro Mayor must stick to the high ground of the big issues facing the city region. Essentially they must deliver the economic development agenda. They will need to focus on skills, transport, planning, international promotion, inward investment and marketing. Most argue that for this to be done properly the Mayor should create a single powerful economic development organisation team which would be responsible directly to him.

"The Metro Mayor cannot micro manage the city region. He must not get drawn into that."

Private sector leader
Creating an economic narrative for LCR

Related to this, partners stress that a key task for the Metro Mayor will be to create and develop a clear, single economic narrative for the city region which will identify its assets, develop longer-term strategic and business investment cases for them and align them with available resources. This should be tied in with the Single Investment Fund which is currently being created which can initially call on the £30bn for 30 years achieved under the devolution deal. But in time this should also be the conduit for other sources coming into the city region – the Regional Growth Fund, European funding. The LEP has recently presented a new Single Economic Strategy. But that should be a moving target which reflects developments and changes over time and which takes into account more detailed economic work once the Mayor comes into being.

Creating a spatial story – who lives, works, plays, studies and travels where?

The city region needs to develop a longer-term spatial story which will identify the longer trends in the economy, what investment will go to which places, where jobs are likely to occur, where the housing provision will need to go and how it will be connected by public and private transport. Currently the local authorities have their own plans. But there is not a single document which pulls all those parts together into a single coherent narrative. The Mayor again should be the driver of and voice for that plan when developed. It should be his story for local and global consumption.

“The Metro Mayor will need to link the benefits of growth to excluded communities and create a better quality of life. It could go wrong if we just focus on big projects which no relevance to ordinary people for example living in Spode.”

LCC councillor

Putting the private sector voice at the heart of policy making

There is concern that the private sector should be able to contribute easily and consistently to the Metro Mayor’s strategic priorities. The precise mechanism whereby this can be created is up for discussion. The LEP may be changing its role in future. Some want an Advisory Economic Council as in Glasgow. Others simply want a small powerful group to provide the Mayor with advice and challenge support as and when required. Many private sector partners have offered to help the future Mayor in such a way. However it is resolved, the issue does need to be addressed. At the moment it is not clear how this will be achieved.

Strengthening capacity

There is great concern that the Combined Authority and the Metro Mayor should have enough capacity to deliver a coherent city regional strategy. Many argued that Liverpool Mayor had no had a big or powerful enough office. Everyone is absolutely clear that must not happen at city regional scale. The Metro Mayor is the embodiment of the devolution idea and must not be allowed to fail. So there is huge support for the principle that the Mayor must be able to recruit a powerful team to support him. This is investment which will be necessary to deliver. And it will need the right people with the right skills and experience to deliver it. It cannot be done on the cheap.

“The Metro Mayor’s new office needs proper resources. This can’t be done on a shoestring.”

Academic leader

“It will be difficult and we will need really good people and some policy wonks. We need really bright people not just fast trackers.”

Private sector leader

“We need a really powerful Cabinet Office. Not just duff middle managers.”

Private sector leader

“We need the courage to appoint the right level of people even if it is expensive. We can’t afford to miss the opportunity.”

Private sector leader

“We have to create a proper Mayor’s Office. We should use it to fast track civil servants to Liverpool.”

Policy analyst

What personal qualities will a Metro Mayor need?

This job will be a big challenge. Partners will have high expectations. The Metro Mayor will need to be statesmanlike and able to manage the political complexities involved in the city region. He or she will need to be analytical enough to address the wide range of strategic issues the city region will face. They will need to be proactive rather than simply reactive. He or she must be a good listener to show they respect the interests of all parts, parties and partners. But the Mayor must set and sell the city region’s long term agenda. So he or she must also be a good communicator and able to champion the Liverpool city region case locally, nationally and internationally. This also underlines the need for the Mayor to have a very good team around him. No single person will have all the qualities needed to address all these issues.

Finally – Brexit and the Metro Mayor

The job of Metro Mayor was always going to be a big one. Brexit has made it even bigger. First the scale of the economic and social challenges in the city region has been underlined by the way different parts voted to remain in or leave the EU.

The Metro Mayor will need to lead on that big agenda and keep different parts of the city region together. Second, the future roles of some individuals in government who were involved in developing the devolution, city region, Metro Mayor and Northern Powerhouse agenda are uncertain with the inevitable change of government. The Metro Mayor will need to try to ensure that any new government is as committed to this agenda as is the current one.

Third, the referendum result has also raised worries about potential internal divisions and threats to social cohesion within the city region. Again the Metro Mayor will need to promote and protect cohesion. Fourth, Brexit raises questions about the status of EU programmes and the potential loss of resources which could have a major impact on the city regional economy.

Last, but possibly most important, the impact of Brexit on private sector attitudes, behaviour and investment plans on the city regional economy could be a big challenge for the Metro Mayor.

He or she must encourage continued private confidence in and commitment to the city region.

So economic, institutional, political and financial uncertainty means that the Metro Mayor’s role as the champion of the city region’s economic future will be even more important. Clarity, confidence, commitment and consistency of vision, purpose and actions will be crucial. But if the challenge is great, the need for leadership at city regional level is even greater. If the principles of behaviour were right in the good times, they are even more right in the difficult times. The opportunity for a Metro Mayor is a compelling one.
This report reflects the views of a large number of people whom I interviewed on this project. I am extremely grateful to them for their help.

They include:
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Joe Anderson, Mayor of Liverpool
Professor Janet Beer, Vice Chancellor, University of Liverpool
Garry Banks, ARUP
Chris Bliss, Chief Executive, Liverpool 1
Elaine Bowker, Chief Executive, City of Liverpool College
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Alan Chape, Fellow, Heseltine Institute
Danny Clare, Mayor’s Office
Flo Clucas, ex LCC Councillor, Chair Mayor’s Commission on Europe
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