

Mayoral elections guide



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Context

This summer, many areas in England will be electing a mayor. There are four kinds of mayor, three of which are elected to their post. The powers held by a mayor vary depending on the type of local authority or region in which they hold office.

How does the voting work?

All the mayoral elections occurring in May will use the Supplementary Vote (SV) system, a form of 'preferential' voting. This means that at the ballot, a voter has the opportunity to cast two votes, by ranking their first and second preference. For a voter's ballot to count, they must record their first preference candidate, though they don't have to record a second preference. First preference votes are then counted, and if a candidate gets over 50% of the vote they are elected. If this does not happen after all the first-preference votes have been counted, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated, and their supporters' votes are reallocated to their second preference. The candidate at this point with the highest number of votes is declared winner.

Combined Authority Mayors (Metro Mayors)

Combined Authority Mayors, known as Metro Mayors, are directly elected leaders of combined authorities.

Combined authorities are statutory bodies made up of neighbouring local authorities that have formally chosen to work together. They have a devolution deal with Westminster which gives them power to make strategic decisions across whole city regions. Metro Mayors were first elected in 2017, as a result of a number of city regions reaching devolution agreements with the UK government.

In England, there are ten combined local authorities, eight of which currently have elected metro mayors. In May, seven of these will vote to elect their mayor, with West Yorkshire Combined Authority voting to choose their first ever metro mayor.

Powers

Each combined authority, or city region, has its own specific devolution deal, which can be read [here](#).

Each of the 8 metro mayors due to be elected this summer will be responsible for slightly different areas and will have differing levels of power when it comes to decision making.

All metro mayors lead on planning for their region's **transport, skills training and economic development**, which covers development projects and **housing**. Some metro mayors also have power over their area's health and social care policy and adult education. If you would

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like to know more on the specific powers of each metro mayor, there is a wealth of information [here](#).

All metro mayors act as a representative for their region, and so in many ways are the face of their local area in the media, and in larger national discussions and debates. As they lead on planning for economic development, they have a large influence over investment, which can shape the character of a region. As part of their devolution agreements, metro mayors hold the UK government to account, and ensure regional interests and needs are heard.

What are the big issues in these elections?

Vision and strategy for the region

Metro mayors are responsible for shaping the vision for their region, both strategically through oversight for industrial investment and development, and culturally as they act as figurehead and representative of their region on a national stage.

Metro mayors have control over 'Local Industrial Strategy', which allows them to develop economic strategy for their region and allocate funding for development programmes to foster growth. As a result, they have significant say in which areas of industry the region will prioritise during their tenure, and the shape of the region during this period. You might want to think about which industries are important to the character of your community, or particularly need support and investment over coming years.

As figurehead of the region, mayors play a significant role in shaping and promoting the cultural character of a region. As their powers are the

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product of negotiations with the central UK Government, their vision for the future of the region and its place in the UK as a whole influence their relations with central Government, and the way the region interacts with other authorities in the UK. Their 'soft power' has been highlighted clearly during the Covid-19 pandemic, in which many negotiated for their region in discussions with the UK government, as well as leading their area's response to the crisis. Put simply, the vision a mayor has for your region will be the foundation of their work, so is worth real consideration.

Transport

The majority of Metro Mayors have autonomy over transport in their region and have received significant pots of funding, as part of the 'Transforming Cities Fund', to shape their transport infrastructure. As the geography and needs of each region differs, the resulting priorities will vary, but as most of the mayors have control of both the local road networks in their area and the public transport links, this is a policy area that mayors have real power to alter. This is also a key opportunity to prioritise action on climate change; effective, carbon neutral and safe public transport systems could play a key role in a just and green recovery locally.

Housing and planning

Whilst the specific powers vary, metro mayors have power over the development of homes in their region. Through their planning powers, metro mayors can set strategy for the development of affordable housing in their region and dictate the use of existing land resources in a way that meet the specific needs of their communities. As the housing crisis

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presents in varying ways across the country, the devolution of powers regarding housing strategy means that mayors can tailor their budgets to best meet the particular needs of their region, using tools such as compulsory purchasing powers and Mayoral Development Corporations. This is a key area in which mayors can choose to prioritise action for the climate, through sustainable development and the use of existing land.

Questions

Here are some question suggestions you might want to ask your metro mayor candidates.

- 1. Vision:** What do you think are the main challenges our region is currently facing and how do you intend to address them?
- 2. Industrial strategy:** Are there any particular industries you intend to prioritise through the Local Industrial Strategy during your tenure?
- 3. Transport:** How will you prioritise our journey to net-zero through our transport infrastructure?
- 4. Housing:** How will you ensure local people have access to affordable housing in our region?

Local Authority Mayors (City Mayors)

Local Authority Mayors, or City Mayors, are the directly elected heads of a single city council or local authority. They are responsible for public service delivery within the area their authority covers, and act as leader, or executive, of the authority. Fifteen local authorities have directly elected mayors, and five of these due to re-elect their mayor this summer: Bristol, Doncaster, Liverpool, North Tyneside and Salford.

Powers

City mayors act as executive of a single local authority. This means they are the leader of the council and have powers over the services their local authority provides, working alongside councillors. You can see what the powers held by mayors and local authorities are [here](#).

City mayors, just like metro mayors, act as figureheads of their city. They are the most public face of a city's leadership, and have significant influence in shaping the character, priorities and vision of their area. Alongside this, as council leader, they are involved in decisions about the day-to-day provision of many vital services. The aim of direct election is that they should provide clear accountable leadership to their residents.

What are the big issues in this election?

As city mayors are the leaders of single local authorities, their priority issues will be similar to those for local councillor elections. These differ community to community, but there are some general topical areas you might want to think about ahead of the elections.

Climate crisis

Whilst local government action is largely dependent on funding and the way powers are devolved, there are ways in which local authorities can prioritise climate action. For example, these could include:

- 1. Making net-zero commitments:** Your local council could commit to a net-zero target and establish implementation plans.
- 2. Transport:** Effective, carbon neutral and safe public transport systems could play a key role in a just and green recovery locally. Local councils can prioritise decarbonisation efforts. Councils can also play a key role in supporting the transition to electric vehicle use.
- 3. Housing:** Prioritising and supporting housing developments that are future focused, creating accessible housing for everyone, and developing retrofitting schemes which create good work.

Social care

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, we've seen both the importance of social care provision, and the immense pressures these services face. Local authorities have responsibility for the health and social care of their residents. Since 2018, they have begun to develop Integrated Care systems whereby partnerships are formed with the NHS and other care providers to meet the needs of local people. As councillors can play a part in the creation of these partnerships which dictate the care and support available in your local area, social care is a key priority for this election. Some areas you may wish to consider are:

- 1. Funding:** Councils have the power to raise council tax levels which can be used to support social care funding, and commission services that dictate how social care provisions will be allocated and provided.
- 2. Strategic planning:** As highlighted during the pandemic, local authorities often have to make strategic decisions regarding how their area will respond to crisis and changes in need. Through Integrated Care systems, local authorities work with other partnerships to provide services for local people.
- 3. Children and young people's social care:** As well as public health-centred social care, Local Authorities also control children and young people's social care, which faces a growing mental health crisis, and the repercussions of the pandemic and its lockdowns.

Housing

Local authorities have significant control over the housing stock in their areas, and on policy relating to homelessness. You might want to think about:

- 1. Social and affordable housing:** Councils are responsible for the development of social and affordable housing in their area – including the standards of the housing and how affordable it is.
- 2. Private-Rented Sector:** Councils have powers regarding landlords, and upholding standards for accommodation such as the removal of cladding or fire safety.

- 3. Homelessness:** Your local council can choose how to support those sleeping rough or experiencing homelessness.

Local services

As councils control, fund and manage many local amenities and services, you might want to think about which local services are a priority in your area. These might include:

- rubbish collection
- leisure centres and parks
- libraries
- youth services like youth clubs.

Questions

Here are some ideas for questions you might want to ask your city mayor candidates.

- 1. Climate crisis:** What measures will you take to ensure structural decisions are in line with our net-zero carbon targets?
- 2. Social care:** How are you going to ensure our area's voice is heard in the new Integrated Care System?
- 3. Housing:** How do you plan on tackling the housing crisis in our area?
- 4. Local services:** Which of our local services would you say is most in need of support and investment? What will you do to improve this service?
- 5. Youth services:** How will you ensure that our area is the best place for our young people to grow up?

Contact

We would like to know how this guidance was useful and what should be added or changed for future publications.

If you have questions, suggestions or comments please write to:

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