

Summary of consultation on NECA

The proposed devolution agreement, signed in October 2015 by the Combined Authority and Government was subject to a number of conditions prior to being considered and accepted by the seven local authorities and combined authority. A key condition was consultation.

Approach to Consultation

Consultation and engagement has informed the development of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) and the development of the priorities and key areas in the proposed Devolution Agreement. Consultation has taken place at three key stages, involving a wide range of stakeholders at both regional and local authority levels.

Stage One: Stakeholders including the public were consulted about the creation of a North East Combined Authority during December 2013 and January 2014.

Stage Two: In January 2015, the NECA Leadership Board developed outline proposals for potential devolution themes to discuss with Government and stakeholders. These were consulted upon in March 2015.

Strong support (97%) for the broad principle of devolution was identified through a range of methods including local and regional facilitated events, a questionnaire and the opportunity to submit comments in writing or online. Participants were asked for the views on whether the proposed priority areas were the right areas to concentrate on, if there were any areas missing, and how would they like to be involved in the work of the NECA in the future.

More than 290 people attended seven events held across the NECA area, with the highest turnout in Durham of 80 people participating in facilitated discussions. 101 people from the NECA area completed written responses and online responses were received via the NECA website. In addition, meetings were held with regional stakeholders and North East MPs and House of Lords members.

Stage Three: Following signing of a proposed devolution agreement in October 2015, consultation took place between November 2015 and February 2016 both at regional and local authority area.

This included providing people with information and the opportunity to consider the content of the proposed agreement, ask questions and make informed comments. Participants were asked for their views on whether the proposed agreement focused on the right issues to drive growth in the North East, if there were any key areas to be included in the next round of discussions with government, how they saw their role in implementing the proposals and what would they want to discuss in more detail at future events.

Consultation opportunities were publicised through press releases, local authority websites and social media.

As with previous consultation, the highest turnout was in County Durham with 172 people attending the event held at County Hall. This was supplemented by the participation of 85 businesses at an event hosted by Business Durham at the Gala Theatre in January 2016. Durham residents and organisations also participated in the wider thematic consultation held at a NECA area level.

The remainder of this appendix provides a summary of the outcomes of the Stage 3 consultation, with particular emphasis on the Durham response. It identifies the key themes, level of support, considerations and concerns raised. Consultation methods included:

- A facilitated consultation event at County Hall - part of a series regionally
- NECA website and online consultation
- Business Durham event at the Gala Theatre
- Additional meeting at Teesdale Area Action Partnership

Facilitated Consultation - Durham County Hall

Local consultation events were hosted across the NECA area, the Durham event, held on 9 November 2015, was attended by 172 people. Following presentations on the draft proposals negotiated with Government, facilitated discussions took place. These provided participants with the opportunity to consider the information, discuss, ask questions and make informed comments.

The outcomes of the Durham event strongly reflected regional outcomes and themes, showing broad support for the proposed agreement. Significant to Durham was discussion about rural inclusion and the need to give careful consideration as to how those services that would work across two Combined Authority areas might be impacted.

When asked 'Does the proposed agreement focus on the right issues to drive growth in the North East?' discussions indicated broad agreement and support and the following key issues emerged.

- a) **Governance:** There was wide discussion about the future governance arrangements of NECA and the role of the mayor. Discussions stressed the need for clarity regarding scrutiny and monitoring, the balance of power and decision making in Combined Authority. Questions were raised about the selection and election of the mayor as well as the future cost of the mayor and its administrative office.
- b) **Finance and Funding:** The impact and usefulness of receiving £30m per annum for 30 years covering seven local authority areas was discussed. In particular it was highlighted that this needed to be considered in relation to the ongoing budget reductions across the region. The need for clarity as to how funds would be allocated fairly, including the needs of rural areas was stressed.

- c) **Business:** Discussions stressed the need to focus on economic growth including encouraging enterprise, inward investment and innovation. The need to have a clear relationship with the LEP was also stressed.
- d) **Employment, skills and education:** Ensuring a range of employment opportunities at all levels exist across the area. The need to review and reorganise post-16 education and apprenticeships was highlighted, as well as the need to ensure that pre-16 education meets business needs and future employability. The key link between transport network and access to work and training was also highlighted.
- e) **Health and Social Care:** There was strong agreement that health and social care should be a priority. The governance of the (then) proposed Health and Social Care Commission was discussed including how various partners will be able to influence and shape the direction and decisions.
- f) **Engagement and communication:** Engagement and communication was a key issue in Durham, stressing the need to raise awareness of the Combined Authority amongst the public and ensure that there are continued opportunities for people to be heard. Bottom up engagement is valued and there should be a continued dialogue and with clear, simple and impartial messages.

Participants were asked what they saw as their role in the implementation of the proposals. It was suggested that the following stakeholders need to be involved.

- The Voluntary Sector
 - Partners such as health, police, fire service, universities
 - Town and Parish Councils
 - Trade unions
 - Young people
 - In Durham, Area Action Partnerships
- g) **Boundaries and Geographical issues:** The boundaries of the combined authority were discussed, including the size and diverse needs of the area as well as the urban and rural mix. In particular, the issue that the combined authority boundary is not coterminous with organisational boundaries such as Fire and Police in Durham was a concern.
 - h) **Additional Areas:** Participants were asked to identify additional areas for future discussions with Government about extending devolved powers. The key areas identified were culture and tourism, which it was stressed, should feature as an element in the agreement given its key economic role. There were also some suggestions that the environment and housing should be included as key themes.

The Business Durham Event

Over 85 businesses attended the Devolution Business Event held at the Gala Theatre, Durham on 26th January 2016 which included a presentation on the proposals followed by a question and answer session.

A broad range of questions covering key areas such as targeted investments, business growth and engagement, skills development, the Mayor and governance arrangements, rurality and the need to ensure the NECA does not lose sight of the region's wider connectivity and opportunities were highlighted by attendees. The overall tone of the meeting was in support of the agreement with the majority of those who raised questions indicating their enthusiasm for the potential offered by the proposals.

Teesdale Action Partnership Event

A devolution consultation event attended by 36 members of the public was hosted by Teesdale Action Partnership on 1 February 2016. The event included a presentation on the proposals followed by a question and answer session.

There were a broad range of questions raised by attendees, these covered areas such as how the proposed deal could benefit County Durham, links with neighbouring areas such as Cumbria and North Yorkshire, and the scope for future negotiations and options open to the county council. The impression from the meeting was attendees felt there were a range of factors that would need to be addressed if the agreement was to go ahead.

VONNE (Voluntary Organisations' Network North East) Regional Event

VONNE in partnership with NECA hosted a consultation event on 18 January 2016 at Mea House which was attended by 62 organisations to discuss devolution proposals with the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector. The event was attended by a number of organisations that are based and operate in County Durham. The format was presentations followed by roundtable discussions with opportunity for the VCSE to feed back. There was broad support for the proposal and priorities.

The strong themes emerging from the voluntary sector included:

- The Health and Social Care Commission was discussed and the sector felt it was important that it should be involved in its work.
- The need for continued dialogue, ongoing communications and simple and clear messages. This should include bottom up grass roots engagement.
- The need to review and reorganise post-16 education and apprenticeships was highlighted, as well as the need to ensure that pre-16 education meets business needs and future employability.
- Boundaries in relation to other Combined Authority and potential issues for health, fire and police.
- Working collaboratively could counter balance budget reductions.

The NECA regional online consultation and comments

92 people used the opportunity to respond to the questions posed at the events through a regional online questionnaire on the NECA website.

It is not possible to attribute local authority areas to the responses.

The responses were diverse however similar strong themes emerged which reflect the outcomes of the other consultation methods. These include:

- A strong agreement that the proposal could encourage inward investment, enterprise and innovation to support growth
- The need to look at an integrated transport infrastructure including rural areas and single ticketing with a regional coordinating body
- The additional areas suggested for future consideration were culture and tourism as well as the environment.

In relation to governance, there was significant support for ensuring robust scrutiny and monitoring. Also mentioned was the need to clarify the relationships with other levels of government such as local authorities, parish or town councils and central government.

The importance of grass roots bottom up engagement was stressed as well as the importance of local consultations such as the Durham poll.