

# The Greater Manchester Trailblazer Deal: A summary of the deal and analysis for VCSE organisations

This briefing takes the summary created by Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) on each area of the Trailblazer Deal for Greater Manchester signed in March 2023 and responds with a brief analysis geared towards those working in the VCSE sector. It supports a blog post which can be read [here](#).

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## 1. Governance and accountability

*GMCA summary: New arrangements for accountability to recognise the enhanced powers and responsibilities provided for by this deal. There is also a summary of the governance procedures in place to explain how GMCA will exercise its responsibilities and make decisions effectively.*

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This is important. We know that "With great power comes great responsibility". Whilst devolution will see spending powers handed to GM, central government will need assurances, beginning with a spending framework which will be agreed by end of January 2024. Local MPs will have a role to play in 'public hearings', providing an opportunity to scrutinise the mayor.

## 2. Data

*GMCA summary: A new Data Partnership and commitments to boost GMCA's data capacity and capability, to underpin and support local decision-making, as well as to develop and evaluate policies and programmes with greater impact.*

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This might not seem much on the surface, but lack of access to data held by central government departments can be a barrier to creating quality, locally tailored services and programmes. It should lead to more informed policy decisions, possibly more in line the insight and anecdotal evidence you bring to the table as voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

## 3. Single settlement

*GMCA Summary: A consolidated, long-term budget for GMCA. This single settlement will be designed in the mould of government departments' budgets: set at Spending Reviews and based on thematic functions.*

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This is the big prize. From the next spending review (a longer-term budget where the treasury sets out its spending plans at a high level), expected in 2025, Greater Manchester will receive funding for the areas which devolution is agreed upon, in a single, more flexible pot. This will have parity with the way other government departments, e.g. the Department for Education or the Department for Work & Pensions, are funded. The benefits for GM will be the freedom to allocate resources based on local needs, rather than the current system, which required managing a multitude of central government funding programmes, all with different rules and requirements. You could say this is much like the way many VCSE organisations have to manage their own funding and programme delivery!

## 4. Fiscal devolution

*GMCA summary: Delivering fiscal devolution by extending GMCA's 100% business rates retention pilot for 10 years and working towards designation of specific growth zones with additional flexibility.*

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Retained business rates fund a series of projects at a GM level (if you're interested in the detail you can take a look at the [GMCA paper](#) from earlier this year) – this has given GM the freedom to fund programmes beyond those defined by central government that align with the GM strategy. Much of this work has involved the VCSE sector – for example the foundational economy innovation fund (19 out of 40 funded projects were delivered by VCSE organisations). The security of knowing this funding will be available longer term provides opportunity to be part of developing further projects in which the VCSE sector could be a key partner.

## 5. Transport

*GMCA summary: A new rail partnership with Great British Railways to support the delivery of the Bee Network by 2030, which will see full multi-modal fares and ticketing integration, co-branding, 'pay as you go' ticketing pilots, better integration of local stations, identification of opportunities for regeneration and development, greater access to local rail data and giving GMCA the opportunity to sponsor infrastructure and service enhancement schemes.*

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It is the progress in creating an integrated, 'London-style' public transport system that has captured the most media attention, and is arguably the most tangible and visible difference residents of GM will see. Those organisations supporting socially and economically excluded communities will know that the cost, reliability and accessibility of public transport play a huge role in peoples' life chances, so you will know this isn't just about convenience but has the potential to make a big impact on accessing opportunities for good employment, social connection, learning and many other things that play a big role in wellbeing.

This deal is significant in bringing the rail network into the remit of devolved transport responsibilities, although this will be through a partnership rather than legislative powers. The changes to buses we've already seen and the roll out of franchising which began in September 2023, resulted from earlier policy decisions. Those of you involved in Disabled People's organisations, active travel or environment-focused work may be disappointed that new powers to deal with pavement parking were not included in this deal. The government will be 'considering options for tackling pavement parking and will work with GMCA to explore appropriate powers for mayoral combined authorities in this area'. Whilst this may be disappointing, there is the possibility future deals will consider devolving powers in this area.

## 6. Housing and regeneration

*GMCA Summary: Local leadership of the Affordable Homes Programme for the first time outside of London, worth £400 million to Greater Manchester, with greater powers and flexibilities over time, devolution of £150 million brownfield land funding, local retention of additional funding for housing investment, commitments to joint working between the government and GMCA through the Greater Manchester Land Commission, a Greater Manchester Housing Quality Pathfinder, with new local powers, additional funding and targeted policy support, and £3.9 million to eliminate the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless families in Greater Manchester.*

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GMCA will no longer be required to return any underspend from the Housing Investment Fund and can align this underspend this with an additional £150m funding to be provided during the current spending review period.

Housing campaigners will welcome the devolution of £150m brownfield land funding, but it could be levelled that this falls short of the level of investment needed to challenge the housing crisis. The same could be said about whether the £3.9m for renting homes for families would 'eliminate' the use of B&B accommodation for homeless families in GM.

The big potential here is for the devolved funds to be aligned with other investment to create an integrated approach to developing places. In other words, plans related to housing, skills, regeneration and development can be coordinated and managed in the round, without the need to juggle the varying requirements of different funding streams.

The VCSE sector is a crucial stakeholder when it comes to regeneration and place. In particular, small, locally-rooted community organisations have a role to play in engaging residents based on a history of mutual respect and trust. The flexibility provided through the trailblazer could pave the way for much better aligned strategic working with the sector in future.

## 7. Skills

*GMCA Summary: Devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills functions and grant funding in the next Spending Review, local flexibilities, which will increase over time, over Free Courses for Jobs and Skills Bootcamps during this Spending Review and establishment of a strong joint governance board to provide oversight of post-16 technical education and of GMCA as the central convenor of careers provision in the city region.*

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The agreement includes all non-Apprenticeship post-16 technical education, with the goal of aligning the needs of the city-region with the skills provided. Those VCSE organisations who have been involved with skills provision commissioned at a GM-level will be well aware of the often complex processes and systems required and/or monitoring requirements that come along with such contracts, a result of different programmes originating from different central government programmes. The devolution of grant funding provides an opportunity to address this and make the process more straightforward for all providers, including those in the VCSE sector.

## 8. Employment support

*GMCA Summary: A co-design approach to all future contracted employment support programmes, consideration of potential employment support pilots and commitments to explore data sharing, supported by a new joint board.*

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The VCSE sector in GM has a long history of supporting people into education, employment, and training with the GMCVO-led Hidden Talent and GM Talent Match programmes examples of how voluntary organisations can support those 'Hidden' from mainstream services. Following on from those programmes there are now projects, facilitated by GMCA, that support young people who are NEET and do not claim welfare benefits – "Hidden" young people. Grassroot VCSE organisations with the trust, engagement and reach they have within their local communities are key to this work. The deal does 'Commit to a co-design approach to all future contracted employment support programmes, for young people and adults' – which is a positive signal. There will be a role for the VCSE sector here, and the GM VCSE Accord provides a framework for meaningful engagement. There is greater flexibility now on the form and scale of contracts and GMCA has appointed a Strategy & Partnership Manager with a focus on support the development of VCSE delivery of work and skills projects.

## 9. Innovation & Business productivity

*GMCA Summary: Building on the Innovation Accelerator programme, a Strategic Innovation Partnership to give GMCA a new and influential role informing the national research and innovation ecosystem, a knowledge transfer programme focused on local strengths and a pilot to boost innovation adoption and diffusion by local businesses, transferring more autonomy to Greater Manchester's developing regional innovation ecosystem.*

*Boosting business productivity through a new Strategic Productivity Partnership, enabling GMCA to raise local priorities for future business support and advisory services and ensuring complementarity between national and local commissioning activities, alongside a new role for GMCA in the governance of the next generation of British Business Bank UK funds in the North of England and stronger strategic and operational relationships with the UK Infrastructure Bank.*

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These are areas less associated with the voluntary and community bit of the VCSE sector, but important for our social enterprise organisations, who in particular may be interested in what GM will do to shape future support for businesses. We know that social businesses are a key part of an inclusive economy, and that the economic impact of the VCSE sector contributes significantly to GM's economic productivity. GMCVO is a social investor, so as an organisation operating in that world, we have a keen interest!

## 10. Trade and investment

*GMCA Summary: Stronger partnership working with the government across a range of international trade, investment and export activities.*

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International trade isn't something many VCSE organisations are involved in, nevertheless, GM's ability to attract businesses and investment from abroad are key to its economic success which has a knock effect on our communities. Here's [an article](#) on some of the developments GMCA is leading on.

## 11. Net zero and the environment

*GMCA Summary: Piloting the devolution of net zero funding, including for buildings' retrofit, through allocation rather than competition in the period from 2025 onwards, which will form part of GMCA's single department-style settlement, recognition of GMCA's roles and activity across the energy system and further work on standards, green finance and advice to increase household energy efficiency.*

*Further support for GMCA's already trailblazing approach to the environment through natural capital investment. GMCA will act as a testbed to explore and develop options for how flood risk management and other adaptation activities can best be addressed and accelerated at the local level.*

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Devolution of net zero-related funding gives GM the opportunity to go above and beyond what is set out by national legislation, something we have already seen with the 2038 commitment for the city region, 12 years ahead of the UK government's target.

The 5-year environment plan is being refreshed over the next 12 months, we will engage our VCSE networks and involve them in this process. It will be the first time the strategy will have been put together knowing that GM will have freedom to take its own approach.

As part of GMCVO's work under the Accord we have already begun to scope out the role of the VCSE sector in achieving net zero and are working with the Bee Net Zero business support programme to see how this can be tailored to the needs of VCSE organisations.

Something we're very conscious of is the [just transition](#), and the role of VCSE organisations in supporting the communities who are most likely to feel the impacts of, but are also some of the least likely to be able to access those things needed to mitigate, the impacts of climate change and wider environmental crises.

## 12. Culture and tourism

*GMCA Summary: A Greater Manchester Strategic Cultural Partnership to support greater funding alignment, joint investment and strategic collaboration between cultural arm's length bodies and GMCA, and accreditation for Marketing Manchester as a recognised Local Visitor Economy Partnership.*

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Many VCSE organisations will be pleased to see the strategic connection between culture and wellbeing in the trailblazer deal, and the recognition that GM's cultural sector (which includes many VCSE organisations) is a driving force in making GM a great place to visit. We will champion the VCSE's role on the partnership in line with the VCSE Accord.

## 13. Digital

*GMCA Summary: A new Digital Infrastructure Leadership Group to accelerate the roll-out and take-up of high-speed digital connectivity, alongside engagement in Project Gigabit and on digital inclusion.*

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The role of the VCSE sector in supporting people who are digitally excluded is well recognised, with many organisations involved in current GM-level work to tackle digital exclusion and digital poverty. Accord partners will ensure that there is sufficient VCSE representation on this leadership group, and advocate that the sector plays a part in any programmes which result from it.

## 14. Public service reform

*GMCA Summary: New levers to support GMCA's commitment to public service reform and work with people facing multiple and complex disadvantage, including, in addition to the Housing Quality Pathfinder, future engagement to discuss whether relevant new funding streams could be devolved as part of the single settlement.*

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This will be an area of interest for lots of VCSE organisations in GM, who often support people who slip through the cracks, or face barriers to accessing mainstream services. The language in this area of the deal doesn't provide much in the way of concrete commitments in terms of transferring power or resource (possibly because so much of public service commissioning sits with local authorities, which is beyond the scope of this deal) – but it reflects the fact that this has been a priority for GM for some time, and provides a signal that there is work to be done. There is also a soft commitment to include funding within the Single Settlement at a future date which could provide more flexibility to spend this money, aligning alongside funding for other policy areas.

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