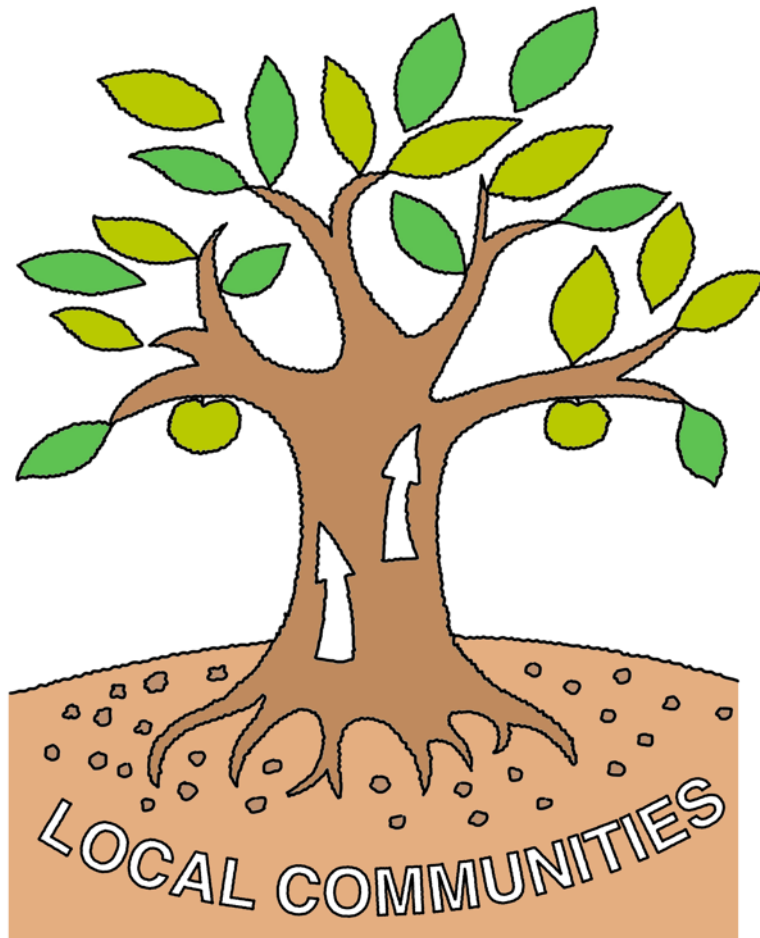


# Regional devolution



Devolution must be rooted in local communities

### **We welcome regional devolution**

We welcome the idea of devolution beyond Westminster. Done well, it can provide opportunities and potential solutions to the challenges we face.

### **Devolution must be rooted in local communities**

The top-down, economic focus of regional devolution must change. We want a democratically focussed devolution that starts with local communities and grows from the ground up. It should be rooted in the priorities and outcomes that are important to citizens in our towns and villages.

### **Local identity matters**

Our history, and the history of our places, is important to local people and to councillors. Citizens feel a real sense of concern that towns and villages have lost their identity and lost their connection with the council when becoming Kirklees. Local people are worried that devolution may further weaken our sense of identity. This is why devolution must be rooted in our communities.

### **Citizens need to know what's happening**

Many of our local citizens, and many councillors, are unclear about what regional devolution is or what it will mean for them in the places where they live and represent. Public understanding of the opportunities and implications of regional devolution is minimal. Over time this needs to change.

### **Councillors should lead the dialogue**

Local councillors should be leading the dialogue with, and on behalf of, our citizens. In this way, we will make sure that Kirklees is strongly placed to influence and access the opportunities presented by devolution.

### **Democratic accountability is essential**

Whilst the focus should be on outcomes, we want to emphasise the importance of democratic accountability and transparency as part of regional devolution. Any decision-making model should be democratically legitimate.

## Regional devolution

Regional devolution is an ongoing journey with a future that is as yet unclear. Our focus is on what we can do in Kirklees to maximise the opportunities. We want to see an emphasis on democratic accountability and legitimacy, and we need the different levels of our democracy to connect.

The issue of regional devolution has loomed large during the course of our work. We have heard many perspectives on this as we have explored the policy context, the government's approach, the deal-making process, governance models and public awareness and understanding.

At the time of writing, we don't know what the devolution "deal" for our region actually is, who it is for, or how it will be governed. However, we have tried to put forward a narrative that looks at regional devolution from a Kirklees perspective, whilst bearing in mind the wider issues that we have discovered.

## Citizens, councillors and local identity

We want to see a regional democracy that evolves from the ground up. It is therefore important for us to place our citizens, towns and villages at the heart of our analysis and our subsequent proposals.

Our starting point is public awareness and understanding.

"Devolution is not a technical exercise, but one that should be about democracy, politics, identity and what people want their communities to be"

**Jonathan Carr-West**

We know that many of our local citizens, and many councillors, are unclear about what regional devolution is or indeed what it will mean for them in the places where they live and represent. At our [Public engagement events](#) we saw a lack of awareness at one level, and at another we heard concern about the weakening of local democracy and a further erosion of local power and decision-making.

[Jonathan Carr-West](#), as part of his evidence giving, explained that the pace of the government timetable for devolution has meant that citizens and most councillors have been left behind.

Similarly, [Rob Vincent](#) confirmed that the top-down approach to deal-making has meant that, thus far, there has been very little regard for the towns, villages and communities that are part of a region's geographic footprint.

We accept that this is an ongoing process and as [Ed Hammond](#) pointed out to us, the deal-making process will develop in stages and, over time, will become more strongly based on public need and local vision. That said, we found [Professor Andrew Taylor](#)'s observation that it is "a very long journey from parish to City Region" very striking. We feel that this is very important as it clearly describes the gap that currently exists between regional devolution and localities within Kirklees. Our focus is on working out how we can best bridge this gap from a Kirklees perspective.

We need to make sure that the voices and needs of our citizens are heard in the region, and our elected councillors are best placed to represent those views. This will involve addressing issues of local identity, being clear and confident with regards to the priorities for our towns and villages, and putting the local councillor at the heart of the connection between their place, Kirklees and the wider region. Taking this approach means that we will need to confront a number of important and long-standing issues.

In our discussions with political parties, councillors highlighted the importance of decisions at a regional level being meaningful, understandable and accountable to citizens and councillors locally. The political groups also said it will be vital for us to illustrate how decision-making locally is impacting on regional issues. They emphasised that we will need greater clarity on the representative role of councillors at the Combined Authority level.

One of the most striking characteristics of our work has been the importance placed by citizens, councillors and expert witnesses on the issue of place and local identity. Kirklees is an artificial construction arising from local government re-organisation – there is no place called "Kirklees" within the Kirklees district. Many of our citizens have commented on this fact during our work, although it appears to be less of an issue for our young citizens. What is clear is that our history, and the history of our places, is important to local people and councillors. This is particularly important in reference to regional democracy.

Our [Public engagement events](#) highlighted a real sense of concern amongst citizens that our towns and villages have lost their identity and lost their connection between the people and the council when becoming Kirklees.

Citizens are concerned that regional devolution might worsen this situation, on the basis of an already weakened democracy and identity.

For some, the idea of local decisions for local people would be undermined by regional devolution. People also feel uncertain about whether it would lead to better democracy or a more remote democracy. Regardless of the balance between regional and local levels, we will need to strengthen local communities if we are serious about enabling our communities to take a stronger lead on local issues. This will also be needed if we want to enable the public to engage with decision-making at a regional level.

[Adrian Lythgo](#) has emphasised the importance of districts being clear about their priorities in a way that resonates with towns and communities. [Councillor Robert Light](#) has emphasised the importance of the need to build on the trust that local councillors already have with their residents and the communities they represent.

“The individual place identities are important and the overall council needs to augment and be respecting of those local identities. In place terms, the competitive advantage is not Kirklees but the distinct parts of the borough.”

**Neil McInroy**

Whilst citizens may not wholly identify with the idea of Kirklees, they do nevertheless recognise their own communities. This is an important starting point. As [Neil McInroy](#) explained, the local places should be the main focus of the regional discussion.

We also feel it is important to accept that, despite many attempts to administratively resolve the issue of local identity, our findings suggest we have been unsuccessful. Whilst this is by no means intended as a criticism, evidence indicates that Kirklees has struggled in developing a model of local devolution that effectively squares the circle of local identity. We have heard from citizens and councillors who have emphasised the importance of local identity and local decision-making, whilst at the same time acknowledging that attempts to effectively marry the two at a Kirklees level have not worked. Various versions of area or district-based decision-making have served some valuable purpose, but they have failed to address this issue in a way that would put citizens and communities in a strong position to realise the potential benefits of regional devolution.

It is for this reason that we advocate a citizen-led approach to determining local identity in a way that is designed by, and resonates with, the citizens of the towns and villages of Kirklees. Local identity can only be determined from the ground up. Local councillors should be at the heart of leading this dialogue with, and on behalf of, the communities they represent. The outcomes of this work should form the basis of a different approach to local priority setting and local devolution. Importantly, it should also help us to be clear about the issues we want to see addressed as part of the opportunities presented by regional devolution.

Developing locally owned identity is an important building block and one that is in our gift to develop irrespective of the discussions that are taking place at a regional level. Once this is in place we should develop an approach to local visioning and priority setting in a way that resonates with local citizens and councillors alike. We should learn from the past but also consider the innovative approaches that have been successfully used elsewhere.

We have had the opportunity to find out about the different methods of engagement used in other countries as part of local visioning and priority setting. [Katie Ghose](#) from the Electoral Reform Society provided us with a summary of the work that has taken place in the Netherlands as part of the [G1000 Citizens Summit](#) initiative and the [Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly](#) approach in Vancouver. [Theo Bass](#) explained the work that has taken place as part of the [Decide Madrid](#) initiative.

We believe that initiatives such as these provide powerful evidence of the ways in which Kirklees could take an entirely different approach to developing citizen-owned priorities that are firmly rooted in local identity. We advocate working with partners and providers to pilot an approach in a particular area of Kirklees. The emerging learning should then be used as the basis for developing a strategic approach.

It's important for elected councillors to be the bridge, conduit and voice of their citizens in conversations about regional devolution. We are convinced that this is a fundamental principle in effectively joining up local place, district and region. At the moment we feel that this is a principle that has been overseen or ignored. We believe it is important for us to look in more detail at the role of the councillor and local representation in the context of regional devolution.

As part of our evidence gathering [Adrian Lythgo](#) emphasised the central importance of councillors being strongly placed to influence the sub-regional agenda. [Councillor Sir Stephen Houghton](#) discussed the potential for a significant

majority of councillors becoming increasingly isolated and less influential, ending up in a “vacuum which could get bigger”. [Neil McInroy](#) called upon local councillors to “shine their torch on the flaws of devolution and be less compliant”. [Rebecca Cox](#) from the [Local Government Association](#) acknowledged the tensions that may result in representing the ward perspective whilst at the same time working across boundaries. This is likely to present challenges, requiring councillors to think on a much broader level beyond their own ward and neighbourhoods.

Whilst these perspectives differ, it is fair for us to conclude that the challenges presented by regional devolution provide a further dimension to what we have already agreed is a changing and complex role. It is for this reason that our recommendations need to be looked at as a whole, given that we are seeking to emphasise the ongoing importance of the councillor role in representing their citizens at all levels.

At a national level we feel it is right that there should be a greater recognition of the important part to be played by local councillors in developing and delivering regional devolution. The top-down process has so far been a barrier to the democratic approach that we advocate, which should be happening from the ground up. Whilst we understand why the top-down approach has been the case so far, we feel that there is an opportunity for us to begin to redress this imbalance.

At a regional level the deal-making process has done little to alter this trend. [Anthony Zacharzewski](#) has described the process as demonstrating some of the worst parts of local council democracy, where “leadership takes its decisions sitting around tables with backs turned to the public.” We believe that there are opportunities to address this democratic deficit by acknowledging and equipping local councillors with the opportunity and tools to play a constructive part.

We feel that an important starting point would be to address the quality and flow of information from a regional to a district level and through to local councillors representing their communities. This should include improving the way in which the Combined Authority produces, publishes and communicates its democratic content. The information about regional devolution needs to be timely, digestible and in a format that supports councillors to play a proactive and meaningful role.

Kirklees Council and our leadership also have an important responsibility in ensuring that councillors have timely information and intelligence that is designed to allow them to lead the dialogue with their communities.



This is partly a responsibility for our leadership but we are also mindful of the need to look at our own governance structures and processes in the context of regional devolution. We have heard from Councillor Sir Stephen Houghton, Rob Vincent and Ed Hammond who have all explained the importance of considering local governance and accountability arrangements with reference to the wider region.

We accept that it is important to align our own structures in a way that allows us to be responsive and flexible. Therefore we recommend that this issue is picked up as part of a wider review of our current governance and decision-making arrangements.

## Democratic and accountable governance

### Starting principles and considerations

Our focus is very much on the important principles for regional governance and accountability, as opposed to structural models. If we start with the principles and get them right, we are of the view that effective structural design should follow. Building democracy into regional devolution should be an important consideration as part of the design of any governance and accountability mechanisms.

As part of our work [Professor Robin Hambleton](#) shared some useful research that he has undertaken, as captured in his report [English Devolution: Learning Lessons from International Models of Subnational Governance](#). Professor Hambleton explored the models for regional governance that are used in other countries. He has identified six principles of good governance that should be used for designing structural models:

- civic leadership
- effective decision-making
- transparency and efficiency
- accountability
- public involvement
- business engagement

[Ed Hammond](#) emphasised the importance of governance structures being designed in a way that assists the Mayor or Combined Authority to provide a framework where councils can do things in a way that makes sense for them.



We support these principles and we also want to emphasise the importance of:

- local flexibility in determining the most effective model of governance
- a bottom-up approach to design
- the sharing of ideas and responsibilities at regional, district and local level
- strong emphasis on elected accountability, as evidenced by the models that are used in other countries

We believe that taking such an approach will help us in addressing the current disconnect between regionalism and localism. Sadly, this has not been the approach taken thus far.

## **Regional devolution and elected mayors**

We agree with the Local Government Association's position that elected mayors are not the only answer and that there should be more scope for local determination. This is borne out by [Professor Robin Hambleton's](#) research. We are also mindful of the result of our local Mayoral Referendum on 4th October 2001, which rejected the proposal for an Elected Mayor for Kirklees. The extent to which there is any public understanding, appetite and support for this model in Kirklees is at best unclear.

We have approached the issue of mayoral devolution from a practical position, in light of the government's focus on this model as part of the deal-making process. We have tried to understand the potential implications and consider what they could mean from the perspective of the council, our councillors and most importantly the citizens of Kirklees. We accept that this is likely to be a gradual process, which is why we have tried to focus on what we should be doing at a Kirklees level, although it is important to explore this model in more detail.

As part of our evidence gathering we have heard a range of perspectives on the merits or otherwise of elected mayors. [Jonathan Carr-West](#) provided us with an interesting insight into the potential benefits of having a Mayor in the context of operating in a global economy. [Rob Vincent](#) shared his personal experiences of working in local authorities with elected mayors. In some cases, this can work well, whilst in others the Mayor can become distanced from the rest of the councillors and the council. [Adrian Lythgo](#) explored the potential for an Elected Mayor to destabilise the current Combined Authority arrangements.

All of the points raised are relevant when considering the potential opportunities and implications of an Elected Mayor for the region, although we want to focus on two points:

**The mayoral role** – Whilst central government has been clear in imposing the Elected Mayor model it has been less clear in explaining the role itself and the powers and expectations that should go with it. This has not helped the discussions at a Combined Authority level, and it has been a barrier to wider understanding by citizens and councillors.

It is for this reason we recommend that government provides a detailed explanation of the roles, responsibilities and expectations of an Elected Mayor.

We feel that this should emphasise the important principles of sharing ideas with others in the region, inclusivity, understanding the place they represent, and recognising the importance of the democratic mandate held by local councillors. Where mayoral models have been unsuccessful or unpopular in the past, a striking characteristic has been an unwillingness or failure to engage with local elected representatives. Whilst it is important that this is built into governance design, we also feel it should be implicit as part of the mayoral role.

**Layers of accountability** – We have looked at representation and accountability on three levels – the region, our district and the local areas within Kirklees. We have made recommendations with the aim of being clearer about the ways in which Kirklees and our communities can play an active and constructive role in regional devolution. In order to fully realise the potential of devolution it is crucial that we have greater clarity in terms of the power and responsibilities that exist at the relevant tiers, particularly in terms of decision-making power and fiscal responsibility and transparency. This is mainly an issue for national government and is one that would assist in fostering wider citizen engagement and understanding as part of a democratic approach to devolution.

We would also like to see more attention given to how the different layers of democracy can be connected into a coherent whole. This is about the relationships between representatives in different democratic tiers. We know that currently our citizens do not fully understand what different elected representatives do – for example, citizens are unclear about how the roles of councillor and MP differ and what they involve. There's a danger that regional devolution may only add a further layer of confusion. This is something that we can only improve in collaboration.

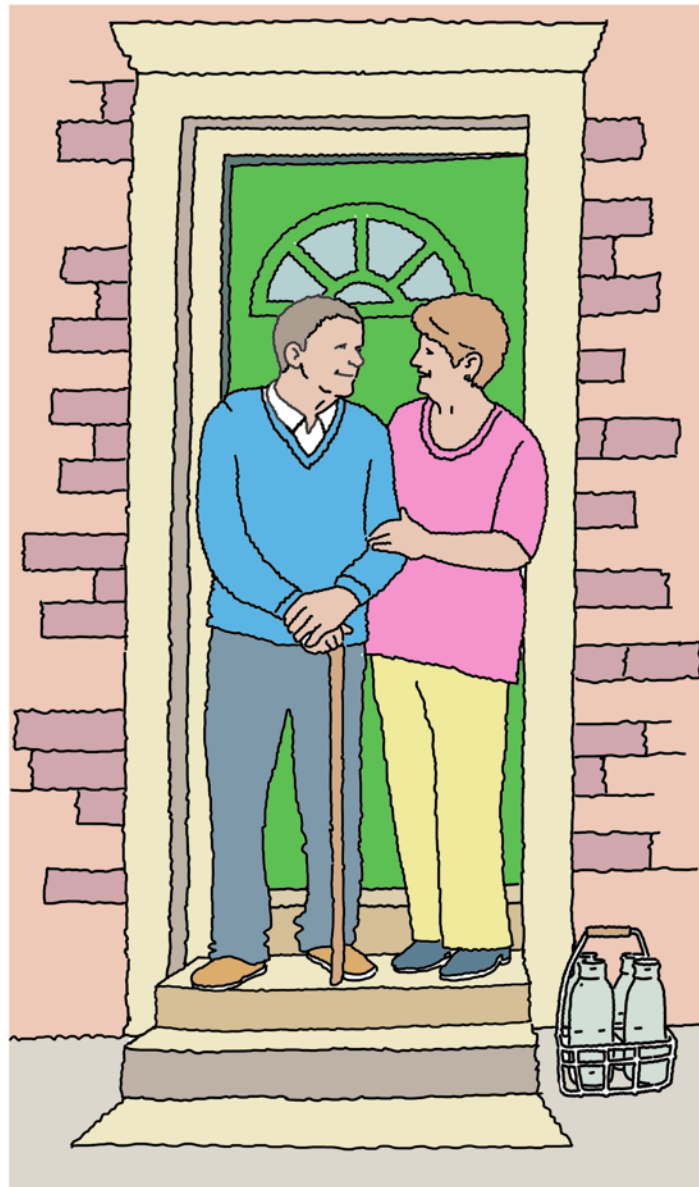
"Devolution is really important, but the way it's been done so far hasn't really turned that tide of power going to Westminster... If we can take decision-making as close to people as possible, we've a much better chance of getting people involved."

**Cllr Rob Walker**

### **Next steps for regional devolution**

We acknowledge that regional devolution is an ongoing journey with a future that is as yet unclear. Our focus is on what we can do to maximise the opportunities for our citizens, whilst being clear as to our expectations of national government, the Combined Authority and a future Elected Mayor.

We believe that regional devolution needs to follow the principles of democratic accountability and legitimacy, and to be developed organically, from the ground up. The structural design of regional devolution should flow from these principles, and from the other core principles that we've set out in our report.



**Kirklees Democracy Commission**

[www.democracycommission.org.uk](http://www.democracycommission.org.uk)

@kirkdemocracy

#kirkdemocracy

**“By 2020 Kirklees is an informed citizen-led democracy with accountable elected representatives who enable communities to influence and affect decisions governing their lives”**