

# Metro-mayors, and the new policy space in England's cities

Blog post by Associate Adviser Roberto Robles, 15 June 2016

Friday saw the close of nominations to be Labour's candidate for the new posts of metropolitan mayors of Greater Manchester, West Midlands, and Liverpool City Region. The choice by an important Labour figure such as former Secretary of State Andy Burnham to throw his hat into the ring for Mayor of Greater Manchester reflects the authority and influence that these new positions are expected to carry, not only in their respective regions, but also within the Labour Party and the broader national policy landscape.

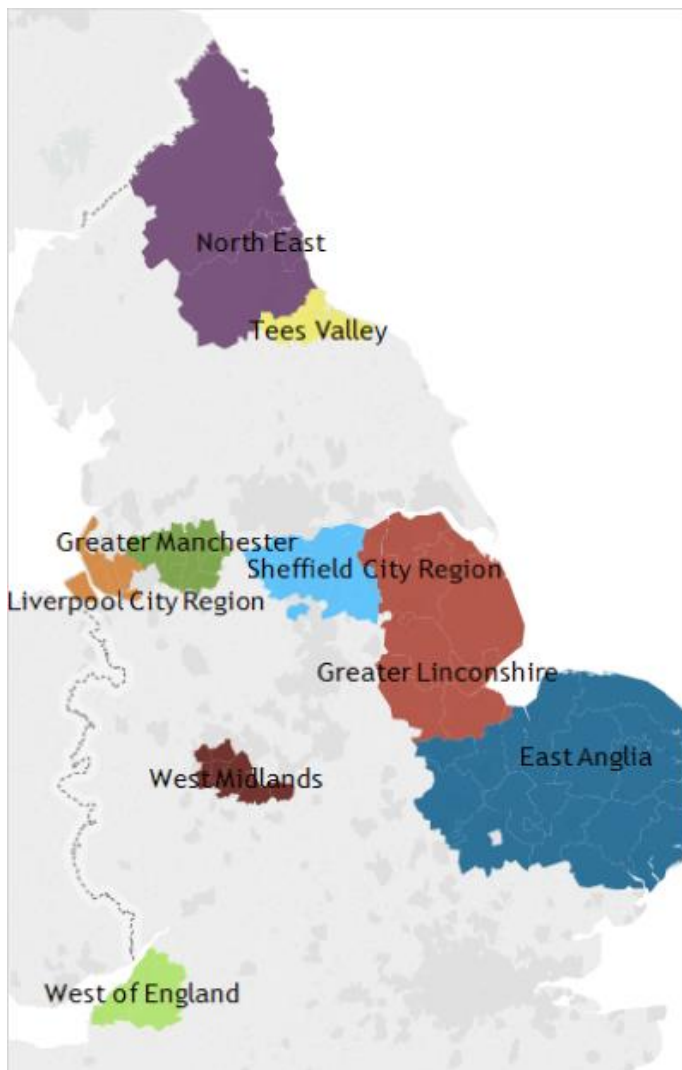


Fig: Areas projected to elect metropolitan mayors in May 2017

As part of the 'Northern Powerhouse' agenda to rebalance UK economic growth across the country, the UK Chancellor George Osborne is devolving significant powers from central government to new combined authorities that will be headed by metro-mayors, to be elected in May 2017. Though the exact powers will vary from region to region, and they will still have to contend with existing structures of local government, the mayors will become major political figures in these cities and set the local political agenda. This ability to make the political weather means what they think, say and do will be significant for operating in these communities. Like the Mayor of London, the new mayors will be able to influence policy even in areas where they have few or no direct powers or responsibilities.

Most of these urban areas are Labour strongholds, and the party's faltering prospects of winning nationally explains the choice of experienced national politicians such as Andy Burnham to follow in the footsteps of Sadiq Khan in London. This matters not only for policy developments in these regions - which will have mayors with significant executive experience - but also for the Labour Party. These new mayors may become significant figures in shaping the

future of the Labour party, and become alternative sources of power and influence to the national leadership.

Devolution to these metropolitan areas also matters for national policy development and debate. It will create new sources of executive power and a new policy space in the United Kingdom, which is likely to lead to policy divergence between different parts of the country, but also policy innovation. These new mayors, with much greater scope than existing council leaders, will be able to implement differing solutions in their respective regions, potentially setting an example for other authorities or even national government to follow. Already, the integration of health and social care in Greater Manchester is serving as an experiment that if successful, could spread to other parts of the United Kingdom.