Appendix 3 - Regional Empowerment: questions and answers

About this document

This document answers common questions about proposals for regional empowerment in Glasgow City Region. It can be read from start to finish or used to look up individual questions.

Nothing here has been agreed. The paper it accompanies is a proposal published for discussion. Some things are deliberately left open – how votes would be taken, the financial limits each council would set, and how transport would be organised – because those are matters for the eight councils to settle together.

Understanding the proposal

1 What is Glasgow City Region?

Glasgow City Region is a partnership of eight councils: Glasgow, Renfrewshire, East Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, North and South Lanarkshire, and East and West Dunbartonshire.

The eight councils have worked together voluntarily for more than a decade, most visibly through the Glasgow City Region City Deal, a programme of investment agreed in 2014.

2 What is being proposed, in short?

Three main changes.

1. **A new regional organisation.** The eight councils would set up and run a new organisation together, created through a law passed by the Scottish Parliament. It could hold money, own land, borrow and sign contracts, rather than relying on one council to act for the others. It could also take on some responsibilities currently held by national organisations.
2. **A different way of funding things.** Today, money for transport, development, business support and investment is spread across different organisations, each with its own budget and responsibilities. This makes it difficult to fund things that need to happen together, such as building new homes and improving the transport links to reach them. The proposal would bring funding together in one longer-term agreement with government, giving local councils more freedom to decide how and when to use it.
3. **One shared plan.** The eight councils would agree what they wanted to achieve across the region and where to invest. This would mean planning transport, training, business support and major developments together, rather than separately.

Together, these changes would give the eight councils more power and money to make decisions about things that affect the whole region. This is what we mean by regional empowerment.

These arrangements have not yet been agreed and are open for discussion.

3 Why do these things need to be done across eight councils rather than individually?

Because people's lives do not stop at council boundaries.

People regularly travel between council areas to work, study and live. In places like Renfrew, Rutherglen and Bishopbriggs, almost half of working residents travel into Glasgow for work.

Take the growing maritime industries along the Clyde. These businesses need workers from across the Region, but much of the help people get to find work and training is organised separately by each council. Working together would make it easier to match people with jobs and training opportunities, wherever they live.

Some decisions are also better made closer to home. National organisations have to consider the whole of Scotland, while the eight councils know which places, transport links and businesses matter most locally. Working together would allow them to make decisions for the region as a whole.

4 What problem is this actually trying to solve?

Too many people across Glasgow City Region struggle with poverty, poor health and finding work, despite the region having a strong economy.

These problems are often connected. Someone might struggle to find work because of poor health, a lack of training or poor transport links. But the help they need comes from different organisations that do not always work together.

The proposal would give the eight councils more power and money to join things up, plan for the future and help more people benefit from the region's economy.

5 Why is regional empowerment being proposed now?

Because decisions that will shape the region for the next ten years are being taken right now.

Changes are underway to how buses are run, how colleges and universities are funded and how health services are organised. The Scottish Government is also considering wider changes to local government, while both governments have shown interest in giving regions more responsibility.

Glasgow City Region wants to help shape these changes while they are being designed.

6 What has the region already achieved?

The eight councils have delivered major investment projects together for more than a decade.

The Glasgow City Region City Deal, agreed in 2014, is a £1.13 billion programme of investment across all eight council areas. It has funded Balgray Station, the Govan-Partick Bridge and the new cruise ship terminal in Greenock, alongside 20 other projects.

Regional working now goes well beyond the City Deal, covering investment in advanced manufacturing, innovation, and business support. Taken together, the eight councils are responsible for a regional programme worth more than £2 billion.

7 Why can't the eight councils just carry on working together as they do now?

The eight councils have worked successfully together for more than a decade, but there are limits to what they can do through a voluntary partnership.

For example, the councils can agree to invest in a major project together, but one council usually has to take responsibility for the money and contracts, including the risk if something goes wrong. Decisions may also need separate approval from several councils, which can take time.

This becomes particularly difficult for major projects that take ten or twenty years to complete. Builders and investors need to know that funding and decisions agreed today will still be in place years later.

8 What decisions would the region be able to make that it cannot make today?

Decisions in five areas: transport, skills, town centres and major development sites, business support and investment.

These are things currently decided by the Scottish Government, the UK Government or national organisations, even though they mainly affect this region. The eight councils would have more say over bus routes, fares and tickets, for example, over what courses local colleges offer, over how people are helped into work, and over money used to help local businesses grow and develop new products.

The councils would have more freedom to decide how money is spent on different projects and plan further ahead, rather than applying for funding separately each time.

The exact powers and funding would need to be agreed with the Scottish and UK Governments.

What could regional empowerment achieve?

9 What difference would regional empowerment make to people's everyday lives?

Regional empowerment could help get major projects moving faster, make it easier for organisations to work together and save public money.

Take Cowlairs in north Glasgow. The site has been empty for around 30 years because the land is difficult to build on and needs expensive work before homes can be built. There are now plans for around 1,000 homes, involving the council, government and private investors. A strengthened regional partnership could make it easier to bring together the money and the organisations needed to get sites like this moving.

Roads are a smaller example of the same problem. A road can be resurfaced and then dug up again weeks later for water, gas or electricity work, because the organisations involved plan separately. Better planning across the region could avoid some of that, saving money and reducing disruption.

10 Would it mean better public transport?

That is one of the main aims, though improvements would take time.

Today, different organisations make decisions about buses, trains, the Subway, motorways and major transport projects. This makes it harder to plan services together, make tickets work across different types of transport and pay for major improvements.

The proposal would bring more of these decisions together and make it easier to plan and pay for improvements over many years.

It could also help with large projects that need funding committed over a long period, such as Clyde Metro – the proposed new public transport network across the region.

This would not delay work already underway to bring buses under public control. That work would carry on, and the new arrangements are designed to support it rather than hold it up.

11 Would it help deliver more homes and improve town and city centres?

It could. Around 66,000 new homes are estimated to be needed across the region by 2040.

Many sites need expensive work before building can start, such as preparing the land or providing roads, water and electricity. Developers may struggle to pay for this upfront when the returns are years away.

In Paisley, plans to turn part of the Paisley Centre into homes and a hotel have struggled to get going. Planning permission was granted, but the developer could not raise the money needed on terms that made the scheme work.

A strengthened regional partnership would make it easier to bring land together, pay for the work needed before building can begin, and commit money over several years. That could help get difficult sites like this moving and give developers more confidence to invest.

12 How would it help people into work, improve skills and support local businesses?

By joining up help that currently comes from several different organisations, and by training people for jobs before those jobs arrive rather than after.

Around 231,000 working-age residents are not in work and not currently looking for work. For many, the barriers are poor health, caring responsibilities, transport or a lack of the right skills – and often more than one of these at once. Help for each tends to come from a different organisation.

The eight councils would also work with colleges and universities to plan training around future jobs. For example, construction companies can struggle to take on apprentices when they only know what work they have for the next few months. A longer-term programme of regional investment would help businesses plan ahead and give more people the chance to train for these jobs.

For businesses, support could be shaped around what local firms actually need, including help to develop new products and a better chance of winning work from major regional projects.

13 How would we know whether regional empowerment was working?

The partnership would publish an annual report showing what it had spent, what it had achieved and which communities had benefited. Its work would also be independently checked, with the findings published, including where things had not gone to plan.

Some changes, particularly reducing poverty and improving health, will take years and depend on more than regional action alone. Reporting would be clear about what the region had contributed and what was beyond its control.

What would stay the same?

14 Does this replace or merge the councils?

No. This proposal would not abolish or merge any of the eight councils, and it would not take over the services they provide.

This is not a revival of the Strathclyde Regional Council. That ran major public services, including schools and social work, across a much larger area. This is different: it would give the eight councils a stronger way to work together on things that cross council boundaries, such as transport, major developments and the regional economy.

The Scottish Government is separately considering wider changes to local government across Scotland. That is a different process. This proposal could go ahead with the eight councils as they are, and the regional arrangements could change later if councils are reorganised.

15 Would councils lose control over local services, including schools and education?

No. Councils would continue to run schools, social care, bin collections, local roads, libraries, parks and other local services. Health services would continue to be run by the NHS.

What would change is that the eight councils together would have more say over college courses and adult training, and how people are helped into work, so these better reflect the jobs and skills the region needs. It would not change who runs schools or who is responsible for school education.

16 Would councils lose control over planning and housing?

Not for local decisions. Councils would still decide local planning applications, prepare their own local development plans and run their own housing services.

There would be one exception. The eight councils could agree together a small number of major sites that are important to the whole Region. For those sites, the regional partnership could agree in advance what can be built and the standards it must meet. This would avoid a long series of separate approvals.

All eight councils would first have to agree that these sites were regional priorities. The plans would be developed with the council and communities concerned. Everything else would stay local.

17 Would this create another layer of government and more bureaucracy?

It would create a new regional organisation, so this is a fair question. But the aim is to move work, not duplicate it.

National organisations already carry out work on transport, skills and economic development in the region. Where responsibility for that work moves to the region, the proposal is that the staff and money needed to do it would move too, so the same work is done once rather than in two places.

It should also be simpler to deal with. At the moment, anyone wanting to invest in the region, or plan something that crosses council boundaries, has to deal with eight councils separately. Government departments, national organisations, utility companies and investors all do this. Under the proposal they would deal with one organisation instead.

Who would make decisions, and how would it be fair?

18 Who would make decisions for the region, and who would be accountable?

The leaders of the eight councils, meeting together, as they do now. Each council would have a seat at the table.

The main change is that, once a regional decision had been made, it could be acted on without going back to all eight councils for separate approval. Each leader would still be answerable to their own council for how they had voted.

Meetings would be held in public and each leader's vote would be recorded, so people could see how their council voted. One council leader would chair the meetings for a fixed period and be publicly accountable for how the regional arrangements were working.

Other councillors would independently scrutinise decisions and spending. They would have their own staff and budget to do this properly, alongside independent audit and published reports.

19 Would Glasgow City Council have more say, and what happens if councils disagree?

No council would control the partnership. The eight councils have worked together for more than a decade and have always reached decisions by agreement. The intention is to continue that approach.

If they could not agree, some decisions could be put to a vote. How those votes would be weighted, and which decisions would need more than a simple majority, has not been settled. The eight councils would agree this before the new arrangements were set up, and views are invited on it.

There would also be limits on what an outvoted council could be required to do. Each council would agree in advance how much money, land or other support it would commit and could not be made to give more without agreeing.

20 How would towns, smaller communities and rural areas benefit, not just Glasgow?

The eight councils would decide together where investment goes, looking at which places and communities would benefit before making major decisions.

That would not mean splitting the money equally eight ways. Different places need different things, whether that is better transport, investment in a town centre or bringing derelict land back into use.

The partnership would publish where the money went and who benefited, so people could see whether their area was getting a fair share of the benefits. The biggest investment decisions would need support from more than a simple majority of councils.

21 How would residents and communities have a say?

People would be involved while plans are still being developed and can still change, not after decisions have already been made.

For major projects, such as transport improvements or changes to town centres, the partnership would seek views from residents, community groups, charities and people who run local services. It would then explain how those views had influenced its decisions.

People would still have the same rights to be consulted on planning and development proposals, and communities would be involved in plans for major regional sites.

Residents could also continue to raise issues through their local councillors.

How would it be funded?

22 Where would the money come from?

Mostly from the Scottish and UK Governments – bringing together funding that already comes to the region, over a longer period, and seeking more alongside it.

The eight councils would also aim to attract private investment, and to keep a share of the value that public investment creates. When new transport or infrastructure makes land and property more valuable, some of that increase could help pay for the investment that caused it.

The proposal illustrates how these arrangements could support around £7.5 billion of investment over ten years. This is an estimate, not funding that has been agreed or promised.

These new ways of raising money would need agreement from the Scottish and UK Governments, and some would need new laws.

23 Would council tax go up?

No increase in council tax is proposed, and each council would continue to set its own. The proposal would allow the regional partnership to raise money through council tax in future, but only if all eight councils agreed. There are no plans to use this power now.

24 Could the regional partnership ever charge council tax itself?

Only if all eight councils agreed. It is not proposed now, and the funding plans do not rely on it.

The proposal asks for the law to allow this option in future, so another Act of Parliament would not be needed if circumstances changed.

Before it could be used, all eight councils would have to agree, with each decision taken at a full council meeting. Any one council could block it.

25 Would businesses pay more?

Not in net terms. One option being considered is a small, temporary increase in business rates for larger properties that benefit directly from a major regional investment.

The principle is that the investment creates additional value that would not otherwise exist, for example through more customers, better access or higher property values. A share of that additional value could help pay for the investment that created it, while the business keeps the rest and is better off overall.

Any charge would apply only to larger properties in a defined area and for a fixed period. It would need a new law, and businesses would be consulted before it was introduced.

26 Would councils have to contribute money from their existing budgets?

Not from existing budgets. Regional projects would be paid for from government funding, private investment and value the projects themselves produce – not by taking money away from local services.

If the income needed to meet agreed commitments was delayed or fell short, the partnership would cover the gap from its own resources first: money it had set aside, income from other projects, and spending not yet committed.

Only if a gap remained after that could the eight councils be asked to help. Each council would agree in advance the most it could ever be asked to pay, and for how long, and those limits would be published. This would be a safety net, rather than the normal way of paying for projects.

How would it fit with existing organisations and wider reform?

27 Is this about taking power away from the Scottish Government?

In part, yes. Some decisions now made nationally would be made in the region instead. That is the purpose of the proposal.

But it would not change who governs Scotland. The Scottish Government itself has called for regions to take more responsibility for the economy, skills and planning, and for less duplication between organisations. This proposal sets out how that could work in Glasgow City Region.

The Scottish Parliament would still make the laws. Scottish Ministers would still oversee the partnership and could step in if it failed to meet its responsibilities.

28 How does this relate to the Scottish Government's wider plans for public sector and local government reform?

It supports those plans, but it does not depend on them, and it should not wait for them.

Glasgow City Region's proposal could go ahead with the eight councils as they are, and could be adapted later if councils are reorganised. Changing council boundaries would not, by itself, give the region the powers and money it needs to get more done.

There is a cost to waiting. Decisions that will shape the region for the next ten years are being taken now, and other parts of the UK are moving quickly. A period spent reorganising, while comparable regions elsewhere compete with powers and budgets already in place, would leave the region further behind than it is today.

29 What would happen to SPT?

SPT would continue. Transport would still be planned across all twelve council areas, and the four councils outside Glasgow City Region would continue to have a say in decisions that affect them.

The main change would be who decides its priorities. Today, SPT plans transport across the area but does not control most of the money or powers needed to improve it. Under the proposal, the regional partnership would decide transport priorities, fares, ticketing and funding, alongside plans for homes and jobs.

Greater Manchester uses a similar approach: the combined authority makes the decisions, and Transport for Greater Manchester puts them into practice.

The details would still need to be agreed with the Scottish Government, SPT and all twelve councils it serves.

30 What would happen to national agencies?

Some of the work national agencies do in the region could move to the strengthened regional partnership, with the staff and funding needed to do it.

This is about moving responsibility closer to the region, not getting rid of the work or losing the expertise of the people who do it. The proposal is therefore for the work, staff and funding to move together.

Nothing would change without agreement with the Scottish Government, and staff and their representatives would be involved in working out the details.

31 What about colleges, universities and the NHS?

They would continue to operate as they do now, with the same organisations responsible for running and funding them.

Colleges and universities would keep their own boards and continue to receive funding through the Scottish Funding Council. What would change is that the region would identify the skills local employers need and could provide extra funding for training to meet those needs.

Health services would stay with the NHS and would not transfer to the region. The Region would work with health boards on areas where health affects people's ability to work, particularly helping people who are out of work because of poor health.

32 Are you proposing a mayor?

No. The proposal is for the eight council leaders to make decisions together, rather than introducing an elected mayor.

Some English city regions, including Greater Manchester, London and the West Midlands, have elected mayors. Glasgow City Region would instead build on the way its councils already work together, with each council having a say in decisions.

33 Why Glasgow City Region, and not everywhere in Scotland?

It is not instead of other parts of Scotland. Glasgow City Region is ready to go first.

The eight councils have worked together for more than a decade, managed a billion-pound investment programme and built up the staff and experience needed to take on more responsibility. That makes the region a practical place to start.

The same approach could then be used elsewhere in Scotland. Other regions could decide which responsibilities they wanted to take on and how quickly. Glasgow City Region would provide a chance to test the approach and learn what works.

Next steps

34 What happens next?

The next step is to discuss the proposals with the eight councils, the Scottish and UK Governments, partner organisations, and the public.

The Region would also work through the details, including which projects to invest in first, how the money would be managed and how decisions would be made.

The proposals could change following these discussions. The eight councils would need to agree the new arrangements, and some changes would require new laws before they could go ahead.