

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Devolution and Exiting the EU, HC 484

Monday 4 June 2018

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Members present: Mr Bernard Jenkin (Chair); Ronnie Cowan; Dame Cheryl Gillan; Kelvin Hopkins; Mr David Jones; Sandy Martin.

Questions 691 - 768

Witness

[I:](#) Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Examination of witness

Witness: Rt Hon Andy Burnham.

Q691 **Chair:** I welcome our witness to this further session on devolution and exiting the EU. Could I invite our witness to identify himself for the record, please?

Andy Burnham: Good morning, Chair. I am Andy Burnham, former Member of Parliament for Leigh, but now the Mayor of Greater Manchester.

Q692 **Chair:** Thank you very much for being with us. We only have an hour, we are told, and therefore we must invite you to be very brisk. We will be as brisk as we possibly can but the sessions we have had with other representatives of English local government have been very interesting and I am sure you have plenty to contribute.

To start with, we have had extensive legislative devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and there has been, to an extent, some devolution, perhaps better described as decentralisation, in England. How would you describe the landscape of how England is now governed?

Andy Burnham: Uneven is the way I would describe it, Chair. Greater Manchester negotiated perhaps the most substantial devolution, or



HOUSE OF COMMONS

decentralisation agreement, to use your words. I think it is a mixture of both, to be honest, part devolution, part decentralisation.

Q693 **Chair:** More than London?

Andy Burnham: In our case, I think a little with health service devolution or the partnership we have with the Government. That is a substantial freedom that we have that others do not. The landscape is very uneven is what I would say, because we have six mayors in combined authorities outside London, each of which has a different deal with the Government, and then of course we have large swathes of England with no arrangement. The system of governance is different: the London model is very different from the Greater Manchester model, for instance.

It is an uneven picture, and from my point of view, from where I sit, the more it is filled in the better, to be honest. I would like more parts of England to have the same that we have, for instance, Cheshire, right on our doorstep. I think the north-west of England will start to punch its weight the more that we all have the same ability to move our own agenda forward and work in partnership on issues where that makes sense.

Q694 **Chair:** What effect do you think decentralisation has had in particular on your area, Greater Manchester?

Andy Burnham: It is early days, but I think it is correcting an age-old flaw in the way we have governed this country, which they say is the most over-centralised democracy in the world. The problem I have had—and you have probably heard me say this when I was here—is that we have an over-centralised system based here, where, in my view, the London perspective on life tends to predominate. Consequently policy is not particularly made with Greater Manchester or the north-west in mind when it is made by civil servants working within the environs of this building.

If you look back in time, if you take issues like industry, when the north needed help with manufacturing, all the focus down here was on the service economy. When you look at education, all the focus has been on the university route, when we wanted more focus on technical education. If you take housing, all the focus has been on owner occupation, when we needed more focus on other forms of tenure. This is the problem that we have had in our country and I think the seeds of the referendum result are in there. There is a sense that in England particularly, the interests of some places predominate over those of others. I think that is a big part of our problem.

Q695 **Sandy Martin:** I was going to ask, Andy, to what extent do you feel that the powers that you have are delegated at the behest of national Government? Do you think there is a danger that, to a certain extent, national Government will determine whether you have any power or not



in the future?

Andy Burnham: It is a good question. It is an open question at the moment in that we have not, in some ways, tested where power really lies. We are beginning to. Transport is a case in point. We have a very live issue today around rail and the management of the rail franchises. I have a very clear view, which I have expressed, about transport for the north, which is: partnership with the Department for Transport on the management of the franchises. The open bit of it is I do not know what they think about what should happen to Northern Rail, and if there is a disagreement, how do we resolve it? Could this partnership approach that we have with the Department actually work?

The same will be true in health service policy. There will be issues at some point that will test the level of Whitehall commitment to devolution. If we genuinely want to do something differently that is a substantial departure from policy here, will that be allowed?

In other areas, I think you could argue that we already have significant devolution—over transport and to some degree over policing. It is a mixture between the different Government Departments. Where we have more of a partnership arrangement, I think the extent to which Whitehall has truly let go is an open question.

Q696 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Andy Street, at a meeting of mayors last November, obviously welcomed the devolution agenda, but he said that it was time for Government to go a step further and provide devolved entities with the tools to tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities that we face. First, do you agree with that? If you do, what do you think the next steps are and what tools do you require?

Andy Burnham: I very much agree with that. I read Andy's evidence to this Committee and I agree with all of it. I do not think there was anything there I would have disagreed on—maybe one or two elements where I had a slightly different perspective. But I was at that meeting in November. I think he was talking about skills. I think we all feel very strongly—all six of the newly-created mayors—that that issue, traditionally regarded as a lower priority in here, is at the top of our priority list. Business is putting it there, because every time we meet business now, they are becoming more anxious about this whole question of the talent pipeline, particularly if there are going to be restrictions on immigration. It is at the top of our agenda and there is a feeling that if we cannot get on and fix that, Brexit is a very uncertain picture for us. We cannot be held back on an issue like that but I think we all feel we are being held back.

Andy said in his evidence to you that the least co-operative Department—I am probably paraphrasing him and maybe using words he would not—so far for us all has been the Department for Education and I would certainly endorse that. We have a small element of devolution, which is the post-19 adult skills budget. It was meant to be devolved this year; it



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was delayed to 2019. We think the Department is also now changing the goalposts and trying to make us pay for the administration of that, rather than devolving the administration budget that goes with that responsibility. We all feel it is a very grudging approach.

The difficulty is—here is my analysis, Cheryl—the Department for Education in England, under any Government, has never properly prioritised technical education; never in the history of this country. The case for the status quo for them holding on to it and not letting us try to do it is threadbare; there is no case for the status quo. If you follow the logic of what the Government mean by saying, “We need local industrial strategies around the country”, which personally I believe is the right policy, as Andy said to you, the other side of that coin is a local skills strategy to feed the industrial strategy. There is not joined-up thinking between the Government Departments. I think we all feel frustration with the DFE.

Q697 Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am very frustrated by that, because back in the 1990s the Department for Education was the Department I first started my ministerial career in.

Andy Burnham: I remember, yes.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am really sorry to hear you say that, but how are you going about trying to have those powers devolved to you at this stage? Does it require primary legislation? Have you had a discussion with the Secretary of State? Do you get access to the Secretary of State?

Andy Burnham: I am meeting him later today—

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Good.

Andy Burnham: —for the first time, which is good. He is a Manchester lad in terms of his education, so there are good grounds for hope there. How do we go about it? The six mayors, I think with the Mayor of London, will meet again next week in Liverpool at the start of the International Business Festival there. Undoubtedly we will repeat the call that we have already made, that we all believe that there needs to be substantial devolution of post-16—not post-19, post-16—skills so that we can begin to build a talent pipeline to feed our priority sectors. For me, they would be digital, tech, advanced manufacturing and materials, all the work that the University of Manchester are doing there; it would be low carbon and renewable energy. This is where we are champing at the bit to get on and do something but we feel we are being held back.

Q698 Dame Cheryl Gillan: Do you need the machinery of Government to do that? Because as my colleague, David Jones, will attest, when we were both in the Wales Office I was very impressed, for example, by the organisational abilities of Airbus and Toyota to come together to provide apprenticeships and that local demand-driven post-16 education. Do you really need the machinery of Government to do this? Can you not act as a catalyst yourself through your office with your local businesses and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

industries?

Andy Burnham: Of course you can, to a degree. The creation of the office of mayor affords convening power to that individual to put businesses, colleges and others around the same table and say, "Look—"

Q699 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** So you have it already?

Andy Burnham: Yes. To answer your question directly, I am developing a proposal for what I call a UCAS-style system for apprenticeships in Greater Manchester. I am trying to build a single clearing system for all apprenticeships in Greater Manchester and I believe that would begin to create some structure in what is a very fragmented and patchy sector at the moment. Also it would allow business more ability to drive the education system than it currently has—because young people would be able to see which courses business has prioritised—and therefore maybe give an alternative focus to the English Baccalaureate. We are on with that, but it would obviously be much better if I had full control over the apprenticeship levy, for instance.

Here is a very direct thing about where we need the Government to go further: the apprenticeship levy is having trouble bedding down, so there has been a drop in apprenticeships starts. Given the urgency around skills, that is a very worrying state of affairs. There are large amounts of money that Greater Manchester businesses have paid that is just sitting there and not being used. That is just daft at this moment in time. Why not put that money under the control of elected mayors and allow us to get on and change things for the better?

Q700 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Or why not just do a pilot with Manchester to see how it works? That is usually how it happens.

Just quickly, before I finish my bit here, you have obviously focused on education, which is absolutely key. Any other tools, anything else at the moment since you have taken office that may be better done under a devolved structure?

Andy Burnham: If I could give two examples: first, Work and Pensions. The idea that you can help people with a single tick box kind of "computer says no" regime run by DWP does not work. It does not get to the heart, it does not allow you to personalise support to help people back into the workplace. We have an element of DWP devolution called Working Well, which is effectively the old incapacity benefit system or ESA for people who are long-term sick. It is already outperforming DWP by two to one. We are getting double the success rate at getting people back into work, because it is very much a personalised approach. We think if we had substantial devolution of the DWP budget, where we could work with local charities, local organisations, we could spend that money much better than the Whitehall "computer says no" approach.

The other one I would point to is transport. It is the single biggest issue holding Greater Manchester back. If you go there at the moment, you will



HOUSE OF COMMONS

see a huge number of cranes. Apparently we have more cranes on the Manchester skyline than any other city in Europe at the moment, which is—

Q701 Dame Cheryl Gillan: A good sign for the economy.

Andy Burnham: It is a staggering statistic. However, the economic growth of Manchester is asking questions of our transport system that it simply cannot answer to anybody's satisfaction. The problem is each mode of transport has a different governance system. We have the roads managed by Highways England, which I would say is fairly unaccountable to the GM public; similarly, Network Rail; the buses are deregulated, so there is no effective governance there. Metrolink, which is our tram system, is governed by the Transport for Greater Manchester authority, but the point is that these systems need to integrate and they cannot because of the way that they are governed. We need the same powers that London has to take one view over transport and make this knit together as a whole. Again, that cannot come a moment too soon.

Q702 Dame Cheryl Gillan: And tax?

Andy Burnham: In the long run, yes, I would not rule that out. We are being offered a proposal from the Government at the moment around supplementary business rates, similar to the scheme that helped fund Crossrail in London, but I do not want to run before we can walk either. I would rather start with taking taxpayers' money that is currently being spent in Greater Manchester that we do not have control over. In terms of the devolution journey, let's start with that. I would want to build towards more self-sufficiency in terms of our own financial position, but I think at this stage I would rather say, "Give us control over what is already being spent here". That would be my first call.

Q703 Mr David Jones: To what extent do you think that England and the regions of England would benefit from a model of devolution closer to that of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Andy Burnham: Very much. I think the story of devolution in this country has been a success. The voice of Wales has clearly got stronger, to its benefit, and of Scotland and Northern Ireland. London has benefited from having those powers on transport that I just mentioned but the problem is that this uneven approach to devolution has increased the frustration elsewhere. As those voices have become louder, the people in the rest of England are saying, "What about us?" and that is one of the issues for the country. We cannot allow this two-tier approach to carry on. Devolution has clearly succeeded. We are an over-centralised country. The answer to Brexit, in my view, is to say, "Let more areas have more power to write their own story, give them more control over where they are going". I think a healthier political culture will develop in those places when power is closer to people.

Q704 Mr David Jones: I want to come back to that last point later, but given that you approve in principle of more democratic devolution, and given



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that, when it was put to the north-east, you recall it was fairly comprehensively rejected, what sort of model do you think would be appropriate for the regions of England?

Andy Burnham: I was one of those very much involved at that time and I was on the board of a body called Yes for the North West. We were going to be the next ones to go in the great John Prescott project, after the north-east resoundingly ticked off the idea of a north-east assembly. That obviously did not happen and then the whole thing went down. The problem with it, looking back, was that it looked administrative and kind of political, if you like, in that it looked like a layer, it felt like a layer to people. I think in the end George Osborne was right to come back with the model that he did, which is not just about the cities on their own, but in our case, the city with those proud Lancashire towns spread around, because then you are uniting town and city in a single administrative model.

I think the answer is to go on that sub-regional model. I do think it is better for us that the 10 members of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority are the 10 councils and their leaders. In our case, I sit at my level with the powers that we have and we are knitted into the local government base. In London, the Mayor and the GLA are kind of free-floating over the local government base and I think that is a much more confusing picture. I think our model is the right model, but as I say, I would like to see it now spread to Cheshire and to Lancashire so that all the sub-regions of the north-west get the same.

Q705 **Mr David Jones:** If I understand you correctly, you do not envisage a form of democratic devolution, the creation of new regional assemblies on the same models or similar models to those in Wales and Scotland and so on.

Andy Burnham: No, I do not think so. You can have a mayoral and combined authority model in all the places that I mentioned and you then allow those areas to collaborate where it makes sense.

Q706 **Mr David Jones:** Presumably—you mentioned, for example, Cheshire—it would require the will of the people to implement some form of devolution there. I think George Osborne made it very clear that if people did not want it, they need not have it.

Andy Burnham: That is also true. If people do not want any form of devolution, again, that should be for them, but they should at least be offered it on fair terms. To answer your question more broadly, I do think there is the ability, when you create mayors and combined authorities, to start to change the way the voice is heard. Two weeks on Saturday there will be a gathering in Newcastle of northern political and business leaders to coincide with the opening of the Great Exhibition of the North. This will plan for the first what we call Convention of the North later this year.

The north of England is beginning to get organised, it is beginning to find its voice, even though everywhere does not have a mayor at the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

moment. Myself, Steve Rotheram and Ben Houchen up in Tees Valley are beginning to say, "Look, we can help convene here with the council leaders and others" and this event will take place later this year. My hope for it is that it will begin to rebalance the political debate in this country from south to north.

Q707 Mr David Jones: What additional powers would you like to see devolved to you and to your authority?

Andy Burnham: Powers over transport, as I said, powers over skills and over schools too. I chair a meeting called the Greater Manchester Reform Board—I chaired it on Friday—and I think it is a pretty unique meeting. I do not think it is happening anywhere else in the country. This is a large meeting that has every public body represented around the table: NHS, police, fire, DWP attend as observers and we had the MOD there on Friday. It is a big gathering. The whole purpose of it is breaking down the silos between these people and making them come up with policies that are kind of based around people and communities on the ground.

With the current structure of schools policy, we do not have a representative for schools there because the fragmented nature of pre-16 education means that there isn't a single voice. I think we would like a Greater Manchester Commissioner for Schools. I am not saying that we take away schools' autonomy, not necessarily, but I do think there needs to be a more consistent approach to education policy pre-16.

Q708 Mr David Jones: You mentioned earlier that you would also like to see greater powers in relation to health. What powers do you have in mind there?

Andy Burnham: We are the only place in the country with health devolution. We have plans for full integration of health and social care, so moving to single commissioning between local government and CCGs: not two budgets, but one budget, commissioning for physical, mental and social need. The power I am seeking there at the moment is the ability to opt out of the activity tariff in the NHS. In my view, if NHS funding worked on a different basis, ie a year of care basis, we would create an incentive to support people in their own home rather than treat them in a hospital. That would allow us to begin to change fundamentally the way NHS services work.

I have put a proposal to the Government on that, which they have not formally come back to us on yet, but I will continue to make that argument. That is a specific thing that I would want the ability to do, as well as—one quick thing—opting out of the caps on nurse training and other clinical disciplines.

Q709 Mr David Jones: That is a fairly extensive suite of powers that you would like to pursue. Do you not still think that that level of autonomy should be underpinned by a more democratic devolution than we have at the moment, again, à la Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Andy Burnham: I think our system is pretty democratic in that the 10 members of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority are all elected local council leaders, so they are democratically accountable in their own communities. The city region model is the right one, because “the north-west” is a kind of construct that maybe people do not necessarily relate to. The city is, in the modern economy, increasingly the driver for growth and new thinking, new ideas. It does make sense to create these new structures around the cities. Obviously, as I have come to know other mayors around the world—the mayoral model in the US, for instance, is very well-established. We need to form not just partnerships among ourselves but with those other big cities in the US and in Europe as well.

Q710 **Mr David Jones:** What is the population of Greater Manchester?

Andy Burnham: Just under 3 million.

Q711 **Mr David Jones:** It is about the same as Wales, which has 60 Assembly Members directly elected.

Andy Burnham: Yes. I do not think the public would thank me if I came up with a plan for 60 GMCA members in a big fancy building. I just do not think they would want that.

Q712 **Mr David Jones:** Do you think that Wales is over-represented with a very fancy building?

Andy Burnham: I did not quite say that. I think you are putting some words in my mouth there, but I would ask the question: does devolution to Wales work as well for people in north Wales as it does for people in south Wales? I would—

Mr David Jones: I could talk to you at length about that.

Q713 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** So could I. Can we just ask, what is the cost of the mayoralty?

Andy Burnham: The cost? It is a very difficult one to calculate because we have brought into our building elements of transport and health. We are beginning to take on the administration that was previously done in separate public bodies. In terms of my own running costs, you are talking about a couple of million pounds a year. I would have to come back to you on the precise figure, Cheryl, but it is around that.

Q714 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Could you write to us? We would just be really interested to know what the costs were.

Andy Burnham: Yes.

Q715 **Mr David Jones:** You touched earlier on the post-Brexit scenario and I think you mentioned subsidiarity. Would you like to see more subsidiarity embedded in our constitution post-Brexit?

Andy Burnham: Absolutely. Gordon Brown has spoken of a more federal UK and I think that is right.



Q716 **Mr David Jones:** How would that work in terms of the English regions?

Andy Burnham: The English regions need to be treated now as entities in their own right. The idea that we have devolution in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and then Westminster looks after everybody fairly in England—it does not feel that way to us. I will give you a direct example in respect of Brexit. Where is our voice in the Brexit process? We have a devolved Administrations committee. I gather there is an Overseas Territories committee, and the Cayman Islands and the British Virgin Islands are on it, but there is no regional committee feeding into Brexit. We get offered these ad hoc meetings with various Ministers. There have been two: one with the Secretary of State, which we attended in York, and another one that was hastily convened in Cambridge with a junior Minister, which I could not attend on a Friday at that notice. We are not satisfactorily engaged in the Brexit process at the moment and we should be. There should be a permanent committee of the English regions feeding into the Brexit process.

Q717 **Mr David Jones:** Even though those regions may have very different priorities, one from the other?

Andy Burnham: That is the whole point, isn't it? My worry is that we could have a London-centric Brexit deal. I have been a Treasury Minister. I know that top of the list for the Treasury when it comes to the Brexit deal will be protecting the City of London. I understand why, because of the tax revenues it generates for the country, but if Europe knows that as well—as they will—they will be playing that off against the other industries that might have to pay a price for the good deal for the City of London.

I cannot just sit there and let digital, tech and life sciences be punished, or other sectors that are important to us, just to protect the London position. We have to be in that mix, fairly representing our arguments, I would say. The lack of any meaningful representation in those talks is a serious issue. It could accentuate the very reason that Brexit came about, which was a feeling in large parts of the country that Westminster and Brussels works well for London and the south but does not work as well for the north.

Q718 **Mr David Jones:** We know that the Mayor of London has regular meetings with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union. As Mayor of arguably the second most important region in the country, why have you not demanded similar treatment for you and for your region?

Andy Burnham: I disagree with the word “arguably”. I would say we are, but obviously Andy Street is not here to question that. You make the point. Maybe I sound like a professional northerner at times with the chip visible on the shoulder, but why indeed does the Mayor of London get a regular—

Mr David Jones: Yes, but why are you not demanding similar treatment?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Andy Burnham: We have tried. I—

Q719 **Mr David Jones:** No, not “we”, you.

Andy Burnham: When I was in the House, I said to the Secretary of State, “Where is the position for the mayors on it?” because we had an interim mayor at the time. That question in the House—that demand—got me this single meeting with the Secretary of State in York, but it was the only one, so I am afraid we do demand it on a regular basis. It has not been delivered and, if the Committee agrees, we would appreciate your help in finally delivering that permanent seat at the table.

Chair: It prompts the question, there is this Joint Ministerial Committee, isn’t there? Am I jumping into somebody else’s question? Right, anyway, carry on.

Q720 **Ronnie Cowan:** I am curious about a number of things you have said. To what level do you think an area like Greater Manchester should have devolved powers? You have mentioned a whole raft of them. Where does it end?

Andy Burnham: Well, I don’t think it necessarily does. Famously, Greater Manchester talks of doing things differently. The more that we have the power to do that—to write policies that are right for us—the more we will make the political culture of this country healthier again.

We have a real problem here, don’t we? People feel alienated from here, from this place, from the way decisions are made and there is a resentment, as I say, that found expression in the European referendum. The answer, it seems to me—well, this is what I found in my first year—is that if you put power over key things, like health, closer to people, you can then actually involve those people in a more meaningful way in the use of that power. In Greater Manchester we say all the time, “We don’t do to people. We’re doing with”. We are opening up the power that we have to write our policies with the voluntary and community sector, the business sector and we are trying to create a new political culture.

The one thing I was clear about on leaving this place was I was not going to come out of here and do the old top-down politics in Manchester. The time has come for a very different way of engaging people in politics. The great thing is—I think Andy Street touched on this—it allows you to leave the point scoring behind and start to focus on place rather than party, and I think that is one of the great strengths of regional devolution. It allows a different way of doing things; that there is a better way of doing things.

Q721 **Ronnie Cowan:** I have to pull you up on that point scoring. You said to the people in the north of England that they should appeal to the Scots to vote against independence because separation would leave us with a higher chance of a Tory Government. Is that not point scoring?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Andy Burnham: That was in the middle of the campaign and I would still—

Q722 **Ronnie Cowan:** What you were saying to the people of Scotland is, “Don’t seek more powers for yourself because what you’re going to do is give England a Tory Government”. That was political point scoring, wasn’t it?

Andy Burnham: That was an argument against independence, and I remain against independence. I put it to you that the parallel in Scotland with what I am saying is: whether or not Scottish people feel more engaged in politics in a positive way following the arrival of devolution 20 or so years ago, and I think they probably do.

Ronnie Cowan: We would agree then—

Andy Burnham: I am making the same point. I am making a point about the culture that you can create with devolution.

Q723 **Ronnie Cowan:** But you are dictating to the people of Scotland how far they can go.

Andy Burnham: No, I didn’t. I—

Ronnie Cowan: At the same time you are saying the people of Manchester—

Andy Burnham: I am against independence is all I am saying, and that was an argument—

Q724 **Ronnie Cowan:** That takes me back to my original question of how far does this devolvment go?

Andy Burnham: My argument, if you just want to develop it, was that I think Scotland and the north of England have more in common than that which separates us and, if Scotland had gone independent, I was saying—if I remember rightly—that that decision would have left the north of England with a Tory Government for some time; I would think the prospect of one would be very real for a long time, and I was saying, “Think about that before you cast your vote at the referendum”. I do think there is an affinity between the north of England and Scotland and I was asking people to think of that bigger picture before voting in the referendum.

Q725 **Ronnie Cowan:** But what you were actually saying, “We need the Labour MPs in Scotland to provide us with a Government in Westminster”. In actual fact, if you look at stats, that is not true. It has never been true.

Andy Burnham: It is getting us slightly off the point, but I think it has been true. Labour MPs in Scotland have helped deliver Labour Governments in the past, no question.

Ronnie Cowan: Okay, we’ll check that. I think I am right.

Andy Burnham: Right, well, okay.



Q726 Ronnie Cowan: Back on the agenda then, what we are seeing is a Government here, which is a UK Government and an England Government. So what would you want to see? How effective are the aspects which are an England Government in governing England equally?

Andy Burnham: They are not. As I say, it is the same thing that you would argue: it is a London-centric approach to the governance of England. If you look at transport spending, for instance, the disparity between transport spending here and the English regions is indefensible and it has always been thus. It seems to me that is the argument for devolution: that you rebalance the governance of England in favour of the cities outside of London.

Q727 Ronnie Cowan: Is that all aspects of transport?

Andy Burnham: Pretty much. The Mayor of London has different powers from the rest of us, so in the 1980s Margaret Thatcher deregulated the buses in England except in London. They have always had the power to run a regulated bus service. They have always had different powers over taxi regulation. There has always been a two-tier approach where London gets a different deal to the rest of the country.

My own Government created a Mayor of London and then, as we touched on before, dipped its toe into English devolution, then backed off very quickly when the people of the north-east spoke against the preferred model. All Governments have been guilty of it. We live in a London-centric country, and I think it is a big part of our problem. In large parts of the north, as you know, big industry was allowed to go into decline and nothing was brought in to replace it and we are still living with the social consequences of that.

Q728 Ronnie Cowan: Working towards a post-Brexit United Kingdom, what specific powers coming back from Brussels do you think should be devolved to the regions of England?

Andy Burnham: Well, certainly powers over economic regeneration. The Government are proposing the Shared Prosperity Fund. We would argue that that should be, as much as possible, devolved in terms of the decisions over what is funded, what the priorities must be, and it must be funded at the same level as we are currently funded through the European structural funds. Andy Street touched on universities and research. That is something I would strongly endorse. There will be other elements of regulation in the environmental sphere, possibly in digital and creative, that we would want to have more control over. It is a confusing picture but it is certainly one that we would want to open up a debate about.

Q729 Ronnie Cowan: What chance do you think you have?

Andy Burnham: Not much I suppose at the moment, given that we do not have, as I say, any seat in the Brexit talks but as a country you cannot bring all this power back from Brussels and then hoard it all here. That cannot possibly be the right response to the referendum result.



Surely the right response is to take the power back and then, if that phrase “Take back control” is to mean anything, it has to be control as exercised by people in their communities so you have to push that power down as low as it can meaningfully go, in my view.

Q730 Dame Cheryl Gillan: You appear, in a post-Brexit United Kingdom, to be advocating far more power coming down to you, in this instance, locally. But I just wondered whether you had sat back and actually looked at the structure of Westminster and the UK Government, because there are two ways of looking at this. Your answer is to accrete more power and to be able to do things locally, but actually, for example with the Mayor of London, you have created in my patch a democratic deficit because all my underground stations are owned by TfL and none of my constituents have a vote or a say over it, which is really frustrating. For me, there is a clear role for central Government but surely central Government should look at restructuring itself so that the north has a more powerful voice.

I would argue with you, on the way devolution has been done for Wales and Scotland, that Wales does not have as powerful a voice as it did, say, 20 years ago and I think I can give you a good run for your money. But you seem to look at it from your perspective and not—having been in this place and been in high office in Government—from the point of view of how we could adapt, adopt and change our ministerial and Executive structure, which could benefit all parts of the country much better.

Andy Burnham: Well, it could and it should. There should be representation for the regions in a permanent structure within the Whitehall machinery. There isn’t at the moment and there definitely should be, Cheryl. I am not defending the precise arrangement in London, which, I would agree with you, is an anomaly that should not exist like that. I do support all of England having the same ability to get the devolution that we have.

It is only on leaving this place that you look at it in a new light, and I have been looking at it in a new light in the last year. I think that the Westminster model is struggling with the modern world. The idea that we can legislate in the old way for all parts of the country, through a White Paper, an Act of Parliament, so basically saying the same policy for everywhere all at once—if it ever made sense in the past it doesn’t make sense now. The economy is fragmenting, cities are changing fast, cities are driving change, and I think change in the future is probably more likely to be driven bottom-up than top-down. I don’t think this place has woken up to that change yet.

Q731 Dame Cheryl Gillan: We are always behind the curve in that sense and I do not disagree with you, but the biggest problem is: how does a representative democracy sit alongside direct democracy such as the referendum? We all suffer from the results of that, and does that threaten our democratic model intrinsically itself? Surely there is a halfway house. Surely, post-Brexit, there should be some things that naturally get devolved, whether it is to the devolved nations or the devolved city



HOUSE OF COMMONS

regions, but surely also this is a time for central Government to restructure itself. If so, and if you agree with that, would you like to give some thought as to how best your area could be served, and other areas of the country, and let this Committee know if you don't want to answer it straightaway?

Andy Burnham: I can give you an answer, Cheryl, now because I have thought a lot about this over the years. For me the "Whitehall knows best" approach does not work. If things can be devolved, they should be devolved. But then what is Whitehall's role? I believe its role should be setting out the "what": what is the entitlement of citizens of this country? What is their entitlement to services? What should we all be able to expect as citizens of this country?

The bit that should be devolved is the "how": how is that entitlement delivered in Greater Manchester? We then could deliver it in a different way, a way that is right for us. I think that is where the point of balance lies. The Government of the day obviously have the ability to say, "We believe these are the policies that everybody should be able to benefit from" but then devolve the way in which they are delivered to people in a local area.

The big thing that we have benefited from in the last year is the ability to start to break down these silos between Government Departments. If you have a very rigid centralised country, these silos go all the way up to Whitehall. On the ground, people working in those services cannot integrate and collaborate. That does not help you deal with the complexity of the modern world where people need much more personalised support to try to deal with the issues that they face.

Q732 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Yes, I agree with you but I think that without having some form of centralised Government in the form it is now, albeit changed to reflect how we are modernising, you do end up with that democratic deficit, because you have people receiving services or whatever, through you as the Mayor of Manchester or through Sadiq Khan as the Mayor of London, who do not have any say in it whatsoever when it comes to delivery of those services. But one of the things that is—

Andy Burnham: I am not sure that is true. I am held to account by 10—

Q733 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Well, it is. My underground stations are the perfect example.

Andy Burnham: That is an anomaly here. We don't have a similar thing like that, though.

Q734 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Can I just ask you one thing? When I first went in as Secretary of State for Wales, we set up a Cabinet sub-committee, which was to look at each Department and have a Minister in each Department who looked at the effects of all the policies. Whether it was Education or DWP or what have you, there was a Minister in each



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Department who was responsible for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, so they always looked at it from that perspective. It did not survive my demise but I think that had some way of bringing about change in the structure of Government that reflected what was going on in devolved areas.

Andy Burnham: I do not disagree, Cheryl. You can reform Whitehall to some degree to do what I am saying—and I think that should happen—but I do think that you will get a healthier political culture in this country where more ability to drive change is rooted at a local level and you can involve more people in the exercise of that power at a local level.

We feel, anyway, in Greater Manchester that it is already building a healthier political culture. I look at this place and the Whip system and the way in which decisions are made, and the point-scoring side of things has left people very alienated. It is only when you leave that you really hear it and see it, and that is what people and business often say. They like the focus on issues, not on the politics of issues, putting the politics before the issue itself.

We all need to open our minds to political change because the turbulence we are seeing in politics—not just here but around the world—is driven by frustration with the old way of doing things. Social media is changing things. It is creating an ability to build movements from the bottom up and we need democratic structures that can respond to that.

Q735 **Chair:** Moving from the Front Bench to the Back Benches also opens up that perspective.

Andy Burnham: Absolutely, which I did briefly.

Q736 **Chair:** You used to rail from the Opposition Front Bench against the postcode lottery but, if you have Whitehall prescribing what people are entitled to, isn't that still basically a very centralising foundation? That you want everybody to receive the same, isn't that going to be prescriptive and centralising?

Andy Burnham: That is the bit where I accept what Cheryl is saying. That is Whitehall's role. As citizens of this country, we should all have the same entitlement.

Q737 **Chair:** Exactly the same entitlement to the same level of service at the same cost wherever you live in the country?

Andy Burnham: Pretty much, and I was one of the Ministers who established—

Q738 **Chair:** You like the revenue support grant settlement? You think that is a good system that has worked?

Andy Burnham: I am talking about citizen entitlement. What I am saying is things like the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

where the NHS has clear guidelines of treatments that should be available to people as opposed—

Chair: Okay.

Andy Burnham: That is absolutely the thing I support, and free education, free health care; entitlements are good things. But I am arguing for the “how” to be devolved: how do you deliver that entitlement?

Q739 **Chair:** I would point out that academics like the local government professor from the LSE—his name escapes me but it will come to me in a minute—have pointed out we have been trying to equalise outcomes across local government in England for the last 150 years. *[Interruption.]* Tony Travers, thank you very much.

Andy Burnham: Anthony Travers. That is what his mother calls him I think.

Q740 **Chair:** Yes. The result has been wider and wider disparities, despite the effort to equalise.

Andy Burnham: Yes. I would say only on the big things—the postcode lottery should not exist on the really big things that matter: on health care, on education. People’s entitlement to those services should be set by Parliament. I have been arguing recently that housing should be added to that list. Housing in the 21st century should be a human right, like health care and education. Parliament should say, “These are things all citizens of this country are entitled to”. How you give them those things should be a locally devolved decision.

Q741 **Chair:** As we devolve more powers and functions currently held at the EU level, throughout England as well as Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, what new capacities do you think, say, Greater Manchester will require in order to take on those responsibilities such as, for example, handling the Shared Prosperity Fund?

Andy Burnham: We would need the teams in the Whitehall Departments or the funding that paid for those teams. An example I gave earlier was adult skills. We are being offered devolution from next April but with no administrative budget. That currently sits in the DFE, so why isn’t that coming to our level? Yes, I would say that devolution is meaningful only if you properly finance it and you allow the capacity that administers policies to follow with it.

Q742 **Kelvin Hopkins:** It is good to see you again.

Andy Burnham: And you, Kelvin.

Kelvin Hopkins: The European Structural Investments Funds are currently an important source of funding for local government. These will be replaced in the short term by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. What are the important considerations for how this funding is allocated?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Andy Burnham: Here is one I made earlier: we have a very clear view on the Shared Prosperity Fund and we gather the Government are going to come out with their proposals later this year. No. 1: we think it should be a multi-year approach so that we can plan for the longer term and get best value for the investment. We think it should be a place-based single pot, so it should not be all streams. It should be a pot that we are able to allocate according to local priorities. We think it should be flexible, so it can be used for both capital and revenue. We don't think there should be limitations on that. We also think that it should be funded at least to the level it is currently at.

At the moment, Greater Manchester gets around £100 million a year from European structural funding. That is directly and indirectly, so we get £50 million directly from Europe and the other £50 million is kind of matched by Government contributions when bids have come in relation to that funding. We are saying that both sides of that have to be in the single Shared Prosperity Fund, so that we are funded at the same level that we currently are. I think Andy Street gave similar figures to the Committee. It is around about £100 million a year, if you add up both direct funding and the match funding that comes with it.

Q743 **Kelvin Hopkins:** Thanks. The Government have caveated their promise to honour existing funding by saying it will be honoured if they are good value for money and in line with domestic strategic priorities. Do you think it is appropriate for Government to place what could be viewed as a political test on these funds?

Andy Burnham: It is back to Cheryl's point, isn't it? It depends, I guess. Are they just the Government's priorities or are they ones that they have talked to us about and we have both agreed about? It is not devolution if it is imposed, "This is what we think and, therefore, you must jump to our tune". It has to be a discussion rather than an imposition.

We have an ongoing discussion at the moment around the local industrial strategy. To be fair to the Government, that is a very welcome development and is being done on a partnership basis. I hope the Shared Prosperity Fund might proceed on the same basis: that we jointly agree with the Government a local and sensible industrial strategy for Greater Manchester and then we have a Shared Prosperity Fund that gives us the flexibility to implement what we have agreed with them.

Q744 **Kelvin Hopkins:** A considerably greater freedom for you to allocate regional funding, investment funding, compared with the situation now, whether it be through the EU or indeed through the Government with their qualifications?

Andy Burnham: Yes. I don't want to sound this morning as if I am asking for all this power for me. It would be for the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and—as I said before to Mr Cowan—we work very much in a "do with" rather than "do to" way, so don't hear this as if I am wanting it all for myself. When we have power and competencies, we are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

very much opening them out to the wider business and voluntary communities to ask for their help in devising policies with us.

Q745 Kelvin Hopkins: Simply replacing EU funding with UK Treasury funding makes no net difference to Government expenditure, but after exiting the EU there will be a net benefit to the Treasury of some £10 billion because we are not contributing to the budget. Could some of that be allocated to regional industrial investment funding to give you a bigger pot?

Andy Burnham: That might be a questionable figure, might it not? Wasn't it all going to the NHS? The message on the coach or the bus promised it all to the NHS, didn't it? If there were to be a dividend—and I am not sure there will be, but if there were—it absolutely should come to the regions to help with the infrastructure that we lack. As I said before, the transport infrastructure simply is not good enough. We did not ask for one, we were promised a Northern Powerhouse by this Government. Yet we have not seen anything like the substantial investment in infrastructure that will be needed to deliver it. So, yes, is the answer. If there were such a dividend, which I doubt, but if there were, I would definitely say it should come to the regions.

I know you have touched on the Barnett formula as a Committee. Mr Cowan won't like this when I say it, but that has to be challenged too—the Barnett formula is unfair to the English regions—and then I think what is left for England is unfairly distributed, with London getting the lion's share. Both those things are unfair and need to be challenged if we are to give northern England the infrastructure it needs to build that Northern Powerhouse economy.

Q746 Kelvin Hopkins: One final question, a left field question in more than one sense I think: could it be useful to look back to the former regional policies advanced by previous Labour Governments, especially the Wilson Governments, which were indeed very helpful to industry. I actually dealt with regional policy at the TUC in the 1970s, so I was very familiar with this myself. Is there something that could be learned from past experience?

Andy Burnham: Absolutely, I think there is plenty to learn. In the past, the country had a clear sense that there were certain industries that certain regions were strong in. As some of those industries went into decline, nothing was done to help them make a transition to new industries. The regional development agencies were maligned by some, but they did a lot of good work when they were in place, so there is plenty to learn from regional policy in the past, no doubt.

Q747 Sandy Martin: We have heard from the Administrations in Scotland and in Wales about wanting to set up mechanisms for inter-Government discussion of how to work post-Brexit, how to create the framework for things like the agricultural policy. Do you think that the regional mayors should be involved in that or do you think there should be a separate mechanism for regional mayors and local government to influence post-



Brexit policy?

Andy Burnham: I would say we should be involved in that and all the discussions around making sense of Brexit. We will make sense of it as a country only if all areas can legitimately feed in to say, "Well, this is how that would affect us". As I was saying to Cheryl Gillian, the London perspective—which is again predominating in this Brexit process, as far as I can see—will not necessarily give us the right result. If you leave it just to Whitehall I don't think it will equally represent the interests of the English regions in the final analysis so, yes, I think in every decision-making function, the English regions need to be properly represented.

Q748 **Sandy Martin:** If the Local Government Association is involved in talking about local government, would you see your role and the role of the Mayor of London and the other metropolitan mayors as being alongside the Scottish and Welsh Governments rather than as part of the LGA?

Andy Burnham: Generally we are a halfway house, aren't we, between the two? I think that is the truth. We are not pure local government in that we are a tier above, and obviously much of the power that I have an ability to influence is—to use the Chair's words—decentralised power from here, so it is not necessarily traditional local government power that is held at the combined authority level. It tends to be power that is linked to Westminster.

We are kind of in a halfway house, aren't we? If all areas had a mayor, it would make sense to have the English regions represented by one person maybe. I don't know—maybe on that same devolved Administrations committee, but I think it is fair to say it is a moot point.

Q749 **Sandy Martin:** Would you be willing or able to give a one minute description of your vision for devolution in England?

Andy Burnham: I will try. It is what I was saying before, where things can be devolved they should be and this place should do what it needs to, which is the big picture, but then it should push power out and down. The future for a place like Greater Manchester is that the modern economy will require us to be able to do more for ourselves. We cannot be held back on skills. We cannot be held back on transport. If we are, we will fall back.

We will have a healthier political culture in this country if we have much more substantial ability at the local level to determine the big policies that matter. My fear is, as I said, if we don't get that level of devolution or if it is uneven, that Manchester will begin to be seen as the London of the north and I don't want that. I want other areas of the north to have the same powers alongside me so that we can all work together.

Once you have devolution spread across areas, our ability to work together as combined authorities is greatly enhanced, I would say, in terms of using our collective power and voice, so my vision is that a new political settlement is needed in this country, based on substantial and



HOUSE OF COMMONS

deep devolution to the English regions, scrapping the Barnett formula, a fairer funding deal, and substantial reform of the House of Lords to make it elected. I think you begin to get a more balanced, healthier political culture if you do all those things.

Chair: A question on the Barnett formula?

Q750 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I was just going to say that we have all looked at the Barnett formula until the cows come home. It has been looked at by successive Committees of this House, including cross-party Committees, and although everybody enthusiastically went in to the Committee stage thinking they could reform the Barnett formula, actually, the conclusions always were, better the devil you know than the one you don't. I just wondered if you really had some concrete suggestions as to how we could adapt, adopt or kick out the Barnett formula and, if so, could you let this Committee have them?

Andy Burnham: Certainly, if I can go back and produce something, I will.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Thank you.

Andy Burnham: It is like social care, isn't it? Everyone knows the way it is funded is unfair but, for fear of the politics of it, no one opens it up or if they do, they quickly regret it. I know the Barnett formula is unfair for a pretty unique reason: when I was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I received an insistent request from one Joel Barnett to come and see me, and he berated me for an hour about why the Barnett formula should be scrapped because it was unfair to the English regions. Can you remember a Member of this place calling for anything named after them to be scrapped? I cannot and I think it is kind of a—

Q751 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I treated it with just the same seriousness when Joel started, but it is true. I mean, we wrestle with it. If you have any contribution to make to this, I think it will be welcomed.

Andy Burnham: I will, Cheryl, thank you. I do hope this Committee will think about how we have a transparent way of overseeing fairer funding allocation across the United Kingdom. Because if we don't, we get into situations where we have the Scottish referendum, and this sense of grievance and unfairness will just simmer away. The country will then be at risk of breaking up. This has to be addressed because, if it is not, it will just come back again and again over the years. We need a much fairer way of distributing funds across the English regions and between the four nations.

Q752 **Ronnie Cowan:** There is a perfect solution. Am I the only one in this room who can see it? Okay. Yes, let's scrap the Barnett formula. Let's go independent. Why not? We are a proud, independent nation of 5 million people. We are more than capable of running our own affairs. Just as a point of interest, for the last 67 years, Scottish MPs have in no way, shape or form constituted the UK Government or influenced the make-up



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of the UK Government.

Andy Burnham: I don't have those figures to hand but to deal with your earlier point, I believe in unions. I believe in trade unions. I believe in the union of the United Kingdom. I actually believe in the European Union. I always believe that you achieve more together than you do working alone. I think your economy and our economy would be poorer if independence were to happen. I don't want to see it. I do want a more federal UK, where each part is able to decide much more for itself, but also where, when we have things in common—war, peace, the big issues—we work together as one.

Q753 **Ronnie Cowan:** At the same time, earlier you said you wanted to take powers back to the people.

Andy Burnham: Yes.

Q754 **Ronnie Cowan:** Okay, so do I.

Andy Burnham: That does not mean independence. The whole thrust of my argument today is that I believe that many things should remain at the national level, and I think if that national level is part of a union—be it the UK or Europe—that is a good thing because countries should work together rather than go it alone.

Q755 **Ronnie Cowan:** A union of equals?

Andy Burnham: We would argue that Scotland has definitely become more equal than others in the union in recent times. You are more equal now than northern England, and that is an issue because in northern England lots of people say, "Well, hang on, they get this there. Why don't we get social care on that basis? Why don't we get university education on that basis?" People are saying that. They used to come to my surgery and say that, so the—

Q756 **Ronnie Cowan:** I am all for having those powers—

Andy Burnham: Scotland having become more equal than others in the original devolution settlement has created a democratic issue in northern England, and that needs to be dealt with.

Q757 **Ronnie Cowan:** I am not questioning that. I am all for those powers going to the north of England as well and the other regions, absolutely. I don't think—

Andy Burnham: But we are not after UDI. We are not after going it alone.

Chair: I think this conversation has run its course, but just—

Q758 **Ronnie Cowan:** I don't think you should temper the ambition of the people of Scotland by saying, "That's what I want for Greater Manchester because that's what you get for Scotland".

Andy Burnham: We have a different view, don't we?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Ronnie Cowan: Yes.

Andy Burnham: I think there are some things that are better done yourself but there are other bigger issues where you are better working in partnership with people, and that is just my view. As I say, I believe in unions of all kinds and—

Q759 **Chair:** But in answer to Sandy Martin's question about the vision for devolution in England, what would you say has generally worked better, a grand blueprint that involves reform of the House of Lords, and all the other things you mentioned, or making incremental progress, place by place, on a rather ad hoc basis?

Andy Burnham: This is what we are in at the moment with George Osborne's approach. I give George credit for talking about the north of England more than probably any Chancellor before him or since. Well done, and I think this is an incremental approach but it is creating its own problems because I have Cheshire saying to me now, as they do a lot, "What about us? Don't forget about us", so you have to let people come at the same speed.

Q760 **Chair:** But the ad hoc approach is it creating demand for change that was not there before?

Andy Burnham: Yes, and I think that is happening. We are getting louder and the Convention of the North may take that on a level, but I am not prepared to wait forever. I think the need for a new political settlement for this country is urgent, and I speak as somebody who tried to represent the north of England in here and found—and I did it as a Minister too—that the way the system works isn't fair. The example I always use is: how can it be that an entire English city that was crying injustice for 20 years was never heard by anybody in here, in either House, elected or unelected? That tells us something about the way this country is run. It does not hear the voices of the north in the same way.

I made this point on the "Today" programme this morning. The pain of northern commuters does not get equal treatment from the Government as the pain of people commuting into London. It just doesn't.

Q761 **Chair:** Do you find that with the BBC as well, despite the BBC being situated in Manchester?

Andy Burnham: Yes, I do. On the day that the new timetable came in, the story on the BBC was all about Thameslink even though we were going through much more turbulence. It is just the way the country is, isn't it? I speak as somebody who is deeply patriotic—as you have just heard—pro UK. I consider myself British, not English first and foremost. I am very, very patriotic. I love London. I love the capital city. I want to see it succeed but it has been to the detriment of other places, in terms of the way this country is governed and that cannot carry on.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Take HS2, to give you a direct example. You perked up all of a sudden, Cheryl. No expense is being spared at Euston station—hear me out—and in the Chilterns as all these measures are coming. We are being asked to pay for the airport station in Manchester. No one else is on the line whereas we are, and at Piccadilly we are being asked to accept a substandard option, again, which is penny pinching. As ever with this country, there is no expense spared down here but the further north you get, the more the money runs out and 'twas ever thus, no?

Chair: Sandy Martin, final question.

Sandy Martin: Yes, I thought I had the final question.

Andy Burnham: I seem to have woken you all up a little bit.

Q762 **Sandy Martin:** Would you say, Andy—based on some of the responses you have already given—that the fact that different places, different regions, different mayors, different authorities have a different set of powers and responsibilities and incomes in different places makes it more difficult for you to actually deal with Whitehall and get the powers and the responsibilities and the funding that you need to get? That in some ways, the incremental system has created a mess that is extremely difficult to navigate through?

Andy Burnham: A little, Sandy, and I think that is a reflection of where we are. Why does Greater Manchester have the most substantial devolution deal? It is a reflection of our symmetry, I guess. We are an easily defined geographical area, a big city with 10 towns around it. But it is also a culture. Greater Manchester had worked together ever since the demise of the Greater Manchester Council in the 1980s, particularly through the Manchester Airport arrangement, whereby the 10 councils owned it. We had an economic magnet that kept us all together, so because of that, we are in a better position, I would argue, to use the powers that have been given. We have an administration that is probably stronger. I am not making a point to the detriment of any other area. It just reflects a culture that has always been there in Greater Manchester.

The way I see it, given where we are, is that if I can make a success working with my colleagues in the 10 councils of using the powers we have been given, we will then help make the case for other areas to be given the same powers. I work incredibly closely with the Mayor of the Liverpool City region, as you might imagine. We are doing things together as much as we possibly can. I do think he should be able to take on board the Police and Crime Commissioner role in due course. I do think he should be given health devolution in due course and, as I say, I would like to see the rest of England get a similar deal.

Chair: We crave your indulgence. You set the time limit but we have further questions. David Jones.

Q763 **Mr David Jones:** This is a very selfish question but, given the importance of Greater Manchester to north Wales—it has traditionally



been the commercial focus of north Wales—to what extent are you working with the Welsh Assembly Government to develop policy?

Andy Burnham: I had a meeting with Ken Skates recently on this very topic, and we do want to work with them. Whether that needs a mechanism that the Welsh Assembly might agree, I do not know, but it could do. Maybe there are schemes that we might jointly finance around transport or energy, for instance, that could be to the benefit of north-west England and north Wales, so I think that is an area to explore, David. I would be very open to an arrangement that may allow us to do that. Maybe the Welsh Assembly could create a combined authority of the northern Welsh local authorities and that might be one way.

Q764 **Mr David Jones:** Would you be interested in addressing a meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Mersey Dee North Wales?

Andy Burnham: Of course, absolutely. As I say, the one thing I want to guard against in this role is the idea that can exist at times that Manchester just suits itself: we just go out alone and we just, you know—I want to build this with our neighbours, and I include north Wales in that.

Mr David Jones: Thank you.

Q765 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** My question follows on from David's because I was going to say, surely, the voice of regions is also very dependent on the activity of the MPs here, and there is the APPG on Mersey Dee North Wales. There is also one on the east of England, East Midlands, Hampshire and the Isle of White, Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire, so MPs here are galvanising themselves. Maybe we need a wider APPG on the north of England and that vision. Maybe that is something that you can co-ordinate because that gives us the cross-party co-ordination and takes it out of the realm of this political point scoring, which has always been so awkward in devolution and, to be quite frank, was one of the major reasons behind it originally, sadly.

Andy Burnham: Absolutely. It is one of the great strengths of regional devolution that you can break out of that and, as I say, it is place and not party. Ronnie's point was a fair one before. There has always been an element of politics, always. We are working hard to make sure it is place first. That it is what unites us rather than what divides us. Parliament should give some thought to what structures might be put in place here. We talked about government structures before, but parliamentary structures may help, so some Select Committees based around models of English devolution would not be a bad idea.

I talked about the Convention of the North before. It would be very much our intention that northern MPs could pick up the conclusions of that meeting and then take them here and see if they can advance them, so these are the things we have to get right. I don't think the north has ever punched its weight properly in here, to be honest, and maybe that is the fault of myself and other northern MPs, but we never did.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q766 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** We took the Welsh Affairs Committee down into Wales, which I thought was really important, so that we saw Westminster politicians sitting on the Select Committee operating in the region that they were discussing.

Andy Burnham: Were there AMs on that Committee as well?

Q767 **Dame Cheryl Gillan:** No. I thought AMs and MPs should sit together jointly—

Andy Burnham: I would have said so.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: —but I am afraid rapprochement hasn't gone quite as far as that unfortunately. I would recommend that. That would be very valuable.

Andy Burnham: Yes. The Committee is in absolutely the territory that the country needs to be in now. With the Brexit vote we are getting trapped in the minutiae of the customs union. There is much bigger stuff here that needs to be sorted out, which is: a place like Greater Manchester—maybe this would be a better answer to the vision question—we cannot sit there now and wait for Whitehall anymore. We cannot afford to. The world is changing around us.

If I am going to entice inward investors to Greater Manchester the big question they ask me all the time is, "The talent pipeline. How can we guarantee that we can get the people that we need and transport?" Two things that are crucial, so we cannot sit here and just wait for permission from some Government Department. We need to be getting on now with giving clarity and certainty on those things. That is the reality of the world that we are now in.

If you look around the world, cities are driving change, economies are diverging across the world and, given that we have opted to change the way we run ourselves, you have to free people up in this moment now to rise to that more uncertain and challenging world.

Q768 **Chair:** It was very interesting that Andy Street talked a lot about the need for decentralisation of skills, planning and development to the local areas out of central Government.

Andy Burnham: Utterly crucial.

Chair: On that urgent and positive note, we thank you very much for coming to see us today.

Andy Burnham: You are welcome. Thank you. It was a good discussion.

Chair: I hope you will be interested in what we have in our final report, which will be out shortly.

Andy Burnham: I am sure I will. Thank you very much, Chair. Thank you.



HOUSE OF COMMONS