



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

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Parliamentary Scrutiny of Institutions with Devolved Powers

Thank you for your letter regarding the scrutiny of institutions with devolved powers in England and for sharing the views of your committee.

The Government has set out in the English Devolution Accountability Framework that these institutions should set the standard for accountability and scrutiny. The Framework also set out new policies that will enhance this accountability and scrutiny further, including a Scrutiny Protocol, Plain English guidance, annual conversations, and outcomes and metrics as part of the Office for Local Government programme.

In support of that overall framework, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands have agreed to organise MP sessions as part of their trailblazer deeper devolution deals. These MP sessions will aid further local scrutiny of their Mayors and the Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs). The MP sessions are reflective of the new responsibilities these areas are taking on in managing the single settlement, which makes them distinct from all other areas with devolution deals, including London.

These MP sessions are not intended to cut across the statutory scrutiny of the MCAs or the formal proceedings of Parliament, but instead are designed to complement them as part of a combination of measures that are increasing the accountability and scrutiny of these English institutions with devolved powers. The intention is not for these MP sessions to look like select committees but instead to be their own forum tailored to the needs of the local areas, drawing on useful precedents of local and parliamentary scrutiny. As such, I am not planning additional staff provision for MPs. While the MCAs will provide a secretariat function for the MP sessions, my expectation is that MPs are supported by their constituency offices to prepare, as that is the capacity in which they will attend the MP sessions.

Minister Young has worked closely with the MPs for both Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, alongside the MCAs themselves, to develop the Terms of Reference for these sessions. They have raised many of the issues that you do, such as on the chair and proceeding for agreeing questions, and I will announce new Terms of Reference shortly. It is my hope and expectation that this collaborative approach enables a good level of MP participation.

You also raise whether proper oversight could be more effectively delivered by strengthening local scrutiny bodies, or more active Government engagement with existing Parliamentary powers. I do not consider this an 'either/or' choice. We should and will do all of these things, and I am also very supportive of Parliamentary Committees taking an active role in scrutinising mayoral performance where they deem it appropriate.

In support of this, we have also published a Scrutiny Protocol last year with a focus on ensuring that each institution has a sustained culture of scrutiny, that membership on their local Overview and Scrutiny Committees is prized and competed for, and that members are retained for several years and devote the time to the role. The Scrutiny Protocol is attached for information.

I am grateful to you for engaging with this important issue of ensuring effective scrutiny of institutions with devolved powers, which is critical to ensuring we have real and effective devolution that empowers local leaders and local communities to determine the futures of the places where they live.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Procedure Committee, Chair of the Liaison Committee, and the Leader of the House of Commons.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Gove', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations