

# GREATER MANCHESTER MAYORAL MANIFESTO

**A Manifesto Delivering  
Sustainable Growth**



# Foreword

In May, voters across England will elect 10 metro mayors, the most to date. By May 3 approximately 26 million people, or 44 per cent of the English population will be presided over by a mayor. And in May, another three mayors will be elected for the first time, in the North East<sup>1</sup>, York and North Yorkshire, and the East Midlands. This combined group of Metro Mayors (the M12) will then collectively represent more than 50 per cent of England's GDP.

With a strong personal mandate, mayors provide a powerful and influential voice, bringing a strategic regional view to crucial policy decisions on areas such as transport, housing, education, strategic planning and infrastructure. All of which are crucial to business. Across England, we see mayors continue to play a vital role in ensuring a region is an attractive place for inward investment and to do business, both domestically and internationally.

The CBI has been a long-standing supporter of devolution and of directly elected mayors, we have seen how they can be strong advocates for their region with the convening power to make things happen. They act as ambassadors for their regions both nationally and internationally, and importantly, provide the governance and accountability Whitehall needs in order to devolve powers and funding.

## Regional priorities for devolution

With a population of over 2.8 million<sup>2</sup>, the location of the UK's first Combined Authority and devolution deal, and an economic potential exceeding all other UK city regions<sup>3</sup>, Greater Manchester continues to be at the epicentre of regional economic growth. From Health innovation and advanced material manufacturing to digital and creative sectors and the green economy- all underpinned by an established education, housing and services sector- the economy of Greater Manchester is primed for growth.

However, businesses operate in tough economic conditions: high-interest rates, rising costs, a tight labour market, and fluctuating demand. In many respects, our region – and its mayor – must not take growth for granted and continue to work hard to tackle intraregional inequality and reinforce our region's economic foundations.

Most importantly, the mayor must use their mandate to relentlessly promote and pursue an ambitious, long-term regional economic vision that recognises existing strategic assets and

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<sup>1</sup> The North East Mayoral Combined Authority will replace the non-mayoral North East Combined Authority and the North of Tyne Combined Authority, whose incumbent mayor is Jamie Driscoll

<sup>2</sup> [Greater Manchester Population \(2024\) - Total Population](#)

<sup>3</sup> [https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/Data/Economy%20Scrutiny%20Committee/20160224/Agenda/7\\_GrowthoftheGreaterManchesterEconomy.pdf](https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/Data/Economy%20Scrutiny%20Committee/20160224/Agenda/7_GrowthoftheGreaterManchesterEconomy.pdf)

clusters, inspires inward investment and tourism, and differentiates Greater Manchester's narrative in a competitive domestic and global market. In pursuing greater regional prosperity, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) must identify the region's most significant economic strengths and unashamedly back emerging success stories.

Public and private sector collaboration is a critical component of all these priorities; a strong industry voice, through the Business Board and other advisory groups, is essential.

**Damian Waters, Regional Director - CBI North West**

[Damian.Waters@cbi.org.uk](mailto:Damian.Waters@cbi.org.uk)



# Drive regional investment

Greater Manchester is a region with a rich industrial heritage and continues to showcase its capacity to lead the urban economic resurgence in the UK. Despite recent economic turbulence, the region demonstrates adaptability and resilience. With a forecast annual average growth of 2.5% in Greater Manchester's GVA between 2024 and 2026<sup>4</sup>, the city region's economy is set to be the UK's third fastest growing. This demonstrates Greater Manchester's ambition to sit at the heart of a Northern Powerhouse and compete with global cities to attract investment.

But to reach its potential and become a truly competitive regional economy, it is vital that the mayor not only champions the region's unique economic, social, and geographical strengths but also sets out an inward investment strategy, building on existing economic clusters. This will be an essential component in leveraging private-sector investment and establishing destination recognition.

Co-creating this investment framework with business partners and shareholders will provide clear strategic direction and give businesses the confidence to co-invest in long-term, strategically important regional assets. That must include centres of excellence such as Greater Manchester's Central Growth Cluster, Media City Innovation and Creative cluster<sup>5</sup> and its world-class education institutions.

This will provide the foundation for the region to attract significant private sector investment, including foreign direct investment, an essential part of ensuring the future growth trajectory of Greater Manchester.

In his report to the government in 2023, Lord Harrington suggested "A need for collaboration over competition"<sup>6</sup>, citing the importance of regions and mayoral combined authorities working in partnership to land investment into the UK. The incoming Mayor should seek to work with the 12 English regional mayors in the spirit of collaboration and act as a powerful collective voice.

For many years, Greater Manchester has been a top performer, growing its economy by an estimated £1.9bn between 2021 and 2023<sup>7</sup>. By following these recommendations, this will continue.

- GMCA must ensure that regional partners receive frequent and consistent communication. This will inform firms of the opportunities on offer and ensure that the region speaks with one coherent voice.
- The mayor must collaborate with the 12 English regional mayors to amplify their collective voice and attract investment to the UK.
- GMCA must continue collaborating with the Department for Business and Trade and other stakeholders to develop a fully integrated export strategy and deliver the Greater Manchester Export Plan. This must include providing targeted business

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<sup>4</sup> [Manchester's economy set to be the UK's third-fastest growing between 2024 and 2026, finds EY report - pro-manchester](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Innovation Hub - Media City UK](#)

<sup>6</sup> [231123\\_Harrington-Review-Report-FINAL-2\\_HH\\_Global\\_.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Greater Manchester's Economy To Grow By £1.9bn And Create Almost 28,000 Jobs Between 2021 and 2023 \(irwinmitchell.com\)](#)

support, highlighting trade benefits, aiding existing exports in navigating EU trade relationships, and diversifying into new global markets as the UK forms fresh trading agreements.

## Future proof the regional labour market to drive inclusive growth

With a population of 2.8 million residents across its ten constituent districts<sup>8</sup>, Greater Manchester's people are its greatest asset and key to unlocking future growth.

However, ongoing issues like declining foreign workers, post-COVID economic inactivity, and a shortage of specialised labour for innovation-intensive sectors continue to erode the region's natural advantage.

The upcoming May elections present an opportunity for the mayor to collaborate further with the UK government and Further and Higher Education providers to bring structural changes to the region's skill provision. This involves removing barriers to work, addressing immediate shortages, and targeting skills required for future demand. As such, the CBI supports Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) and is keen to collaborate with GMCA and FE/HE institutions to integrate its findings. Balancing national and regional priorities can effectively bridge skill gaps across the entire region, and by utilising anchor institutions such as our world-class colleges and universities, we can attract and retain a new generation of highly skilled, highly paid labour.

The mayor should also build on existing partnerships to ensure that all decision-making processes are evidence-led and there is close collaboration to direct funding from devolved adult skills budgets effectively and efficiently.

While a regionally tailored approach to post-16 education, such as that offered by the Greater Manchester Baccalaureate<sup>9</sup>, is vital for Greater Manchester's economic resilience and inclusive growth, the CBI stresses the need to maintain a cohesive strategy that avoids a postcode-based skills provision. A mayor should recognise that while we must meet the challenge of region-specific skills demand, we cannot add more complexity for firms operating pan-regionally or those individuals residing externally to the political geography.

- GMCA should convene education providers and facilitate collaboration to encourage and resolve unnecessary duplication and maximise regional provision of skills. This could be through developing or scaling up a Skills Advisory Panel.
- The mayor should continue to use their personal mandate and national platform to create a strong sense of place, leveraging this to encourage the retention of the working-age population and establish Greater Manchester as an excellent place to develop and build a career.

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<sup>8</sup> [Greater Manchester Population \(2024\) - Total Population](#)

<sup>9</sup> [The Greater Manchester Baccalaureate - Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](#)

- Collaborate with neighbouring authorities to provide a portfolio of training and upskilling opportunities, which are accessible to companies and individuals across the Northern Powerhouse region, regardless of postcode.

## Regional climate commitments to help the UK deliver net zero

Few missions hold a greater moral obligation for both industry and society than the transition to a low-carbon economy. Indeed, this lies at the core of the UK's long-term sustainable growth and how we can revitalise those regions left behind in the wake of deindustrialisation.

Greater Manchester has been at the epicentre of the UK's three previous industrial revolutions<sup>10</sup>. Now is the time to demonstrate its leadership once again in innovative thinking and seize upon the opportunities on offer through net zero and the green economy.

The newly elected Metro Mayor should ensure all policy decisions are 'future proof' with net zero at the heart of a long-term economic vision. Delivering on the UK's climate commitments is not just an economic no-brainer; it also has the capacity to improve the overall health and well-being of those living and working across the region. Through evidence-led collaboration between the private and public sectors, the mayor can implement an environmentally inclusive agenda that enables responsible green economic growth, including initiatives that tackle poor air quality and energy-inefficient housing.

- Lead the transition to net zero, using influence to promote projects and initiatives, drive positive policy change nationally, and support supply chain development locally. The Metro Mayor must showcase regional strengths by setting out a bold, green vision and identifying areas that the Greater Manchester Combined Authority can help in the race to net zero.
- Ensure that any future implementation of a clean air zone is evidence-led and does not unduly impact the SME community located in our region's city centres.
- Partner with Mayors, firms, and local authorities at COP29 to promote the opportunities of Greater Manchester and the North in renewable energy generation and low-carbon innovations such as graphene technology. This should be closely aligned with the work underway across the region's world-class universities and colleges and within the business community, including initiatives such as Net Zero North West.

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<sup>10</sup> [IGM-Exec-Summary-Nov-22.pdf \(gmbusinessboard.com\)](#)

# Drive high-growth technology and innovation

Built upon effective private-public partnerships, major global businesses, a thriving SME and scale-up community, and world-class R&D facilities, Greater Manchester has unique strengths that make it the perfect location for innovative practice and technological development.

A newly elected mayor must recognise these regional strengths and continue to deliver on the six growth locations outlined by the GMCA. This includes centres of excellence such as ID Manchester, a £1.7bn Innovation District conceived in partnership between Manchester University and Bruntwood SciTec<sup>11</sup>, located in GM's Central Growth Cluster. Moreover, the Western Gateway must be delivered, further connecting Greater Manchester with the Port of Liverpool- now designated with Freeport status<sup>12</sup>.

By re-committing to this ambition, the mayor can utilise their extensive convening power and attract the investment and expertise required to drive long-term sustainable economic growth and deliver meaningful projects to scale.

- GMCA must seize upon the opportunity offered by the Innovation Accelerator pilot programme and ensure that selected projects work holistically to deliver an innovation ecosystem, not a fragmented set of isolated projects.
- The mayor should continue to support place-based innovation partnerships such as Innovate GM to ensure that businesses, Local Authorities, and academic institutions are fully integrated in the process to co-develop a strategic innovation strategy that catapults Greater Manchester as the best place to start, scale and retain high-growth firms.
- Support the GM Investment Zone announced by the Chancellor, which aims to deliver more than 30,000 jobs, forecasted private sector investment of £1bn and £160 million, which the public sector will provide<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> [ID-Manchester](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Greater Manchester's Growth Locations \(aboutgreatermanchester.com\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Greater Manchester Investment Zone targets growth and jobs in advanced manufacturing sector - Greater Manchester Combined Authority \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](#)

# Delivery of resilient public services and fit for purpose infrastructure

Confidence in our public services is integral to building a thriving regional economy and a principal component in delivering sustainable, socially responsible growth.

The mayor can drive progress and prosperity by striking a balance between public and private delivery and fostering collaboration. The region must enable businesses to invest, innovate, and share risk in public service provision to succeed. Unlocking capital investment in infrastructure, AI, education, and health requires ambitious, credible, long-term frameworks.

While the cancellation of HS2 was disappointing for both GMCA and regional businesses, there is an opportunity to utilise Network North funding to improve regional services and reignite the possibility of a new £12bn rail line connecting Greater Manchester and Liverpool<sup>14</sup>.

This should work in conjunction with the current collaborative review undertaken by GMCA and WMCA, which looks into three alternative options to replace the scrapped section of HS2 and improve connectivity between the two city regions<sup>15</sup>.

A newly elected mayor must seize upon these opportunities, in collaboration with the private sector, to deliver for the people of Greater Manchester.

- Champion the role of social value in procurement, leading the way with how the combined authority procures goods and services, supporting businesses to engage with their social value potential and go beyond the balance sheet to drive meaningful change. This includes working closely with businesses and stakeholders to build upon the current success of the Good Employment Charter to ensure businesses of all sizes can easily demonstrate their commitment to good employment.
- The mayor should empower the combined authority to develop a strategic framework to identify opportunities and support pan-regional infrastructure delivery – both physical and digital. This will ensure that local plans for employment land uses are equally as important as those for new housing.
- The mayor must use their significant convening power and national platform to continue lobbying for the modernisation of Manchester Piccadilly Station. The combined authority must also ensure that any proposed upgrade maximises commercial development and considers the surrounding environment's community, heritage, and cultural context.

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<sup>14</sup> [PM redirects HS2 funding to revolutionise transport across the North and Midlands - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-redirects-hs2-funding-to-revolutionise-transport-across-the-north-and-midlands)

<sup>15</sup> [Mayors unveil North West to Midlands rail options after HS2 line scrapped - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-56844444)

# Conclusion

On 2 May, the people of Greater Manchester will head to the polls to elect the next Mayor of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

The CBI and its members are committed to collaborating with the next Mayor to ensure that Greater Manchester continues to thrive as a region where people live, work, and conduct business. Despite numerous challenges such as the rising cost of living, inflation, and geopolitical instability, both the region and the nation face, the decisions made by the next Mayor will significantly impact employees, employers, and the entire region.

The CBI contends that when politicians, public, and private sectors collaborate, Greater Manchester can fully unlock its potential. Businesses are poised to contribute by partnering with the new Mayor to advance the priorities outlined in this manifesto.

Business will have the opportunity to hear from all the mayoral candidates at our hustings event, running in partnership with the FSB, Chamber of Commerce, the IoD, ICAEW, and pro-Manchester at Salford University on the 17 April 2024. Register your attendance [here](#)

March 2024

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To share your views on this topic or ask us a question, contact:

**Damian Waters**

Regional Director, North West

[Damian.Waters@cbi.org.uk](mailto:Damian.Waters@cbi.org.uk)