

## Devolution – Evolution

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'Devo Manc', Northern Powerhouse, directly elected mayors. All these new words and phrases have recently entered the housing lexicon and we have to try and make sense of what they mean for both us and our tenants. This is what I'll be discussing at the Devolution - Evolution session, during this year's **NFA Annual Conference**.



It's far too early to say exactly what impact Greater Manchester's (GM) devolution package will have within GM & beyond. But there are some things that we can expect for certain which will have a positive effect on housing in the area.

There are 86 housing providers in Greater Manchester, 20 of which own over 90% of the social housing stock. We have four ALMOs in Bury, Stockport, Wigan and of course, in North Manchester. So there's a lot of housing clout in Greater Manchester. We've already got a history of working together – we have 25 active partners in the Greater Manchester Housing Providers group and we're intending to sign a memorandum of understanding to collaborate even more with each other as well as with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

That document will help us support the work going on in health, complex dependency, crime and policing, employment and training, poverty and low carbon. The opportunities that devolution presents are staggering. There will be devolved budgets on health, for example, and more scope to drive ambitious and innovative projects – like the **NEDO scheme** that the ALMO sector has been working on to bring air source heat pumps to our tenants with new technology developed in Japan.

However, there are challenges too – we need to understand the devolution agenda better. We also need to ensure that housing speaks with a unified voice. With so many players, it could easily become quite confused. And on top of that, we're still dealing with the same challenges as before – local authority funding cuts, the rent reduction and welfare reform, which are not going away under the DevoManc model. We also still have to deliver for our local communities whilst embracing the opportunities devolution offers.

Devolution on its own is meaningless. Devolved powers are a means to an end, not the goal. What it needs is clear high level vision, with a strong aim and purpose. We've got a great grounding for this in Greater Manchester – our geography and our strong history of working together makes it easier for us to develop and drive that common purpose.

So let's build devolution on a collaborative basis!

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