

A good deal for all ages

How Mayoral
Combined Authorities
can make ageing
better in England

March 2023



Introduction

English Metro and County Mayors and their Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) are a relatively new but increasingly important level of regional government.

Around 4 in 10 people in England now live in an area with a devolution deal and a directly elected Mayor, and that number will increase as further deals are agreed. MCAs therefore have powers and influence over a large and growing proportion of the population.

A long-term fundamental age shift within the national population is also evident in the communities that these Mayors lead. More people turn 50 every year than turn 18, and the growth of England's population in every area of the country is driven by growth in older age groups. The success of places with devolved government therefore depends very significantly on the health, wellbeing and economic inclusion of the older population (people aged 50 and over).

Some MCAs are taking deliberate steps to improve outcomes for the over 50s, notably Greater Manchester, but also Greater London, Liverpool City Region and North of Tyne. Strategies across these areas have included a focus on older people in their employment, economic development, housing and other programmes. However, much more can be done.

“Strong local leadership is essential for delivering better local outcomes and more joined up public services. It provides a focal point for innovation and local collaboration with local accountability.”

Levelling Up White Paper, June 2022

We undertook research in 2022 and spoke to officers in the nine MCAs that had devolution deals at that time, plus Greater London, to better understand attitudes, priorities and current opportunities to address demographic change through devolution.

This briefing paper sets out our key findings and looks ahead to 2024. We are committed to supporting the good work and potential of Metro Mayors, other leaders and their teams and partners. We invite these leaders to use our knowledge base to help design and deliver effective programmes on employment, housing and other issues in their areas. We ask them to engage with us as we advocate for a clear focus on the potential and needs of older people of today and the future, so that their economies and communities can thrive and more people can look forward to a better later life.

Mayors and Combined Authorities are an increasingly important part of how England is governed

Currently 10 areas in England have metro governance led by a directly elected Mayor.

In the largest – Greater London – there has been a Mayor and metro authority defined by specific legislation since 2000. In the other areas there is also a directly elected Mayor but the model is based on individual ‘deals’ between central government and local leaders,

and the Mayor leads a Combined Authority (a joint enterprise between constituent local authorities). Eight of these nine MCAs comprise one or more central cities and their surrounding, mainly urban and suburban, areas. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is currently the only MCA based on a traditional county area, and containing only smaller cities.



Figure 1: Metro devolution – timeline.

The current government is committed to ‘widening and deepening’ this model of devolution, with a shift in emphasis towards county areas. It has already committed to expand the current North of Tyne authority to include Gateshead, Sunderland, County Durham and South Tyneside into a larger North East MCA. Deals have been announced or are in motion for Cornwall, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, and York and North Yorkshire. Figure 2, below, shows the current and proposed geographies.

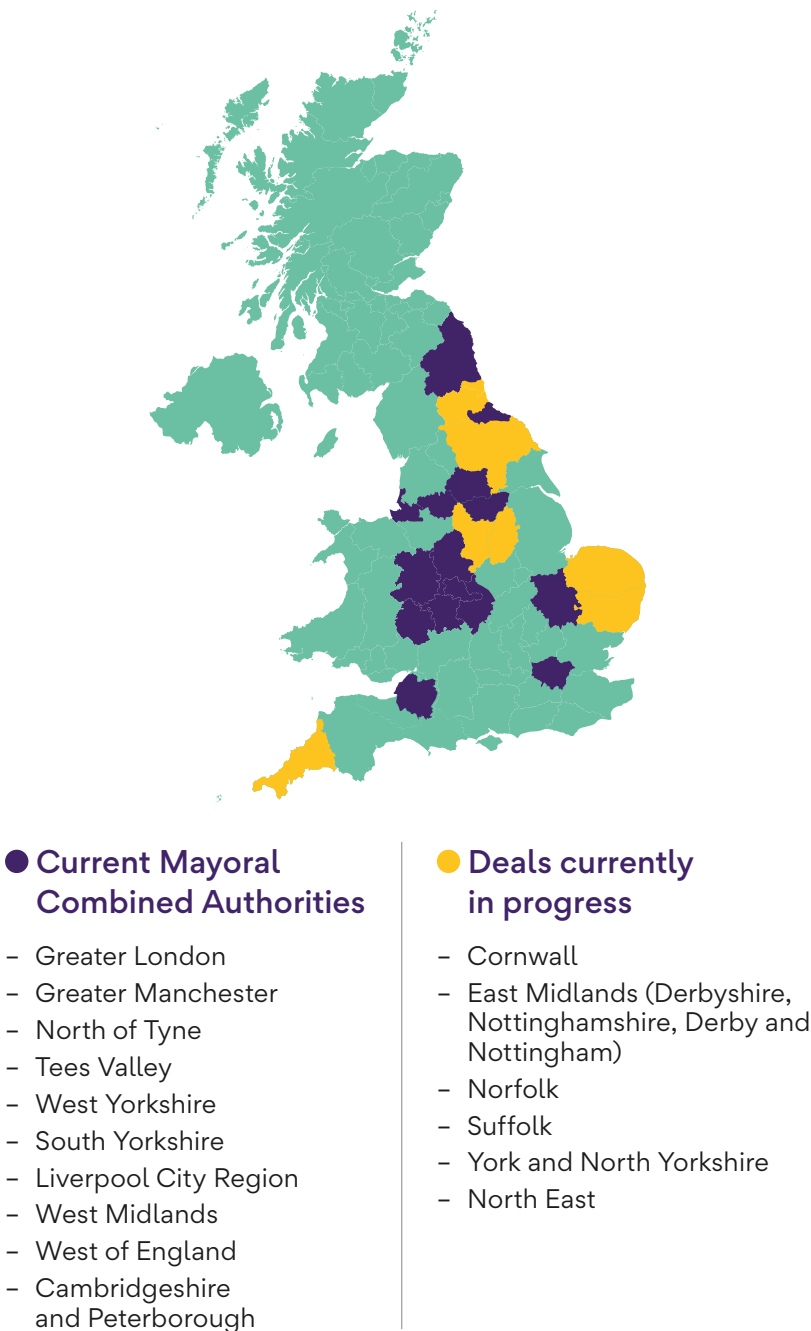


Figure 2: London, MCAs existing and in progress (as of January 2023).

“Stronger, more empowered, and more accountable local leadership is core to our levelling up mission, to delivering on the ground, to growing our local economies and to improving public services.”

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 8 December 2022

Talks are also under way about increasing the powers of the Greater Manchester and West Midlands MCAs – potentially extending to single financial settlements giving more local control over the allocation of budgets. Public statements by the Labour Party, as well as the current government, indicate that there is growing bi-partisan consensus about increasing devolution to further metro and county areas. Across the political spectrum, strong debate is ongoing about fiscal devolution and whether to devolve public spending in a block (like Scotland and Wales), assign a share of tax revenues or allow metros their own tax-raising powers.

All MCAs have significant formal (or ‘hard’) powers and budgets in relation to economic development, infrastructure and skills. Greater Manchester’s is the only devolution settlement to cover health and social care.

Elsewhere, the government is establishing Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) to improve the design and delivery of health in sub-regions, through partnership between NHS institutions and beyond. But the nature of relationships between ICSs and metro government has yet to be fully defined.

Mayors and Combined Authorities have the potential to play a big part in better ageing

Some 36% of England’s older population (2021 data) live in areas with a directly elected Mayor and devolution settlement, in Greater London and the nine MCAs (Figure 3). Once the further MCAs currently in motion are set up, their share of the older population will increase to nearly half. Large urban areas

are very important to an even larger proportion of the population (as many as two-thirds), once we include the people living beyond their administrative boundaries who commute into them for work, and visit for shopping, leisure, specialist medical care and other services.

Population of MCAs

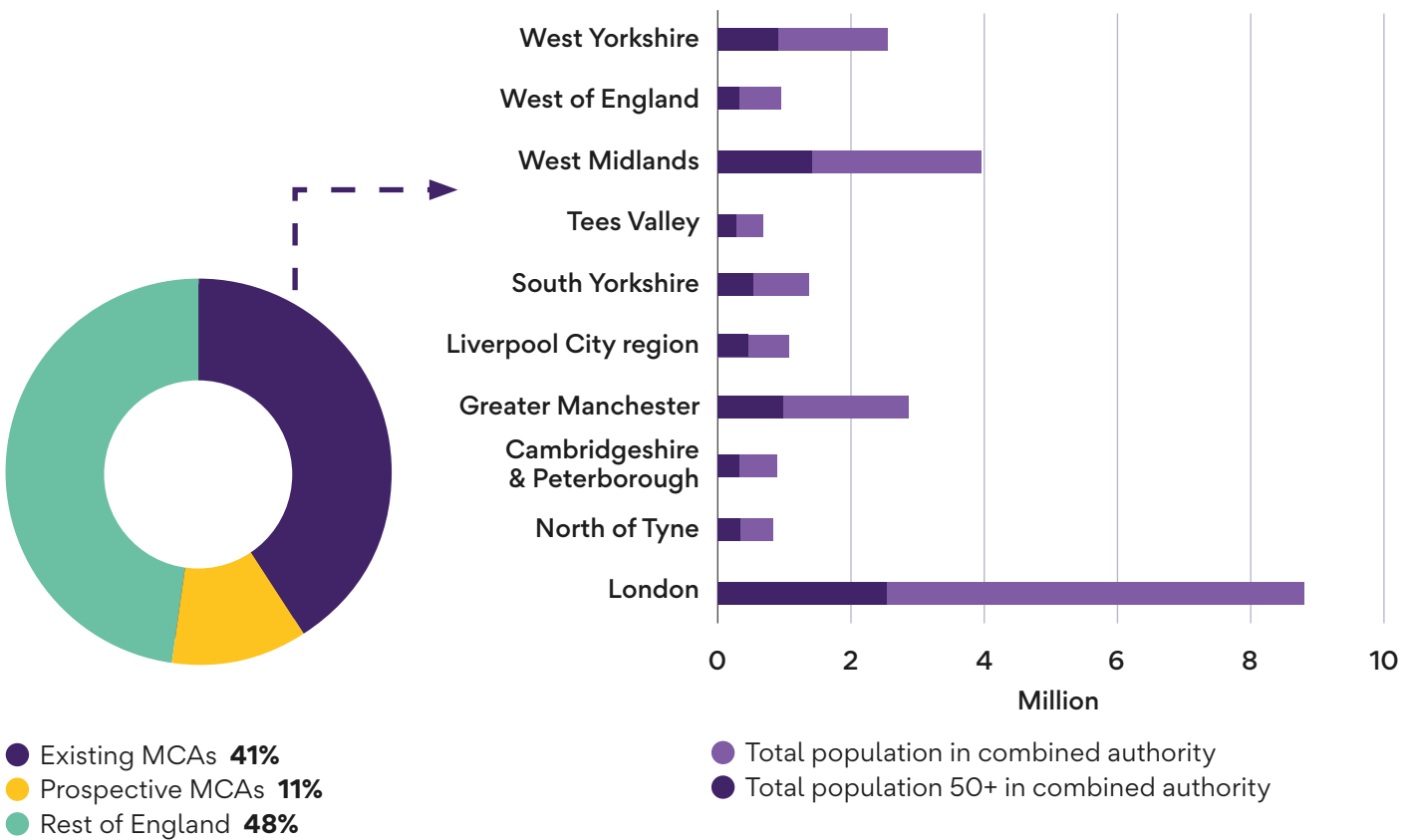


Figure 3: Share of MCA population in England (left), and MCA's population and their proportion of over 50s (right).

The case for devolution is founded on local leaders being more able than central government to direct spending and services to support local economic development and meet local needs.

In addition to their varying but extensive hard powers and funding, Mayors derive informal or ‘soft’ authority from the very significant personal mandate that they secure through election in areas with a population of hundreds of thousands, or even millions. They can and do use that authority to give particular shape to investment and programmes over which they and their Combined Authorities have control. In addition, they can deploy their soft powers on issues outside their remit, for example by acting as a convening authority to bring public services, business and civil society together to tackle challenges important to them.

These soft powers can play an influential role in better ageing. For example, Tracy Brabin in West Yorkshire has set up a dementia task force, and both the Greater Manchester and London Mayors have promoted regional Pension Credit take-up campaigns, alongside civil society groups in the city regions. MCAs can also encourage better work, by acting as conveners of large employers, establishing good employment charters, and using them to promote age-friendly employment practices.

Responding to the opportunities and challenges associated with an ageing population is a classic example of a complex issue, involving policies and services across the boundaries of departments, which central government often struggles to deal with.

“The Mayor can convene people, bring people together, can challenge other institutions, even where it is not in their formal responsibilities.”

Andy Street, Institute for Government, November 2021

By contrast, metro leaders have told us that governance at their level is often well-placed to make progress on such issues: they understand and focus on a geography with its own economic and social distinctiveness, which service and programme leaders understand. Yet they have the scale to think strategically and to manage and deploy significant financial and people resources.

Metros can be particularly well-placed to develop collaborations with higher-education institutions with academic programmes in this area, for example North of Tyne’s collaboration with the Newcastle University-based National Innovation Centre for Ageing (NICA), which is currently working with businesses in the region on new products and services for an ageing population. Or Greater Manchester’s collaboration with the Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group (MUARG) and the University of Manchester’s Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA), which supports an evidence-based approach to programming, including rapid research on the impact of COVID-19 on marginalised groups in the city region.

The potential of MCAs is shaped by local circumstances and leadership, as well as national government

The variation we currently see between metro areas in the extent and nature of their focus on ageing and older people reflects a number of features of the context in which they operate (Figure 4). Mayors have a personal mandate and authority: if that is focused on helping people age well, it can have impact. But they are far from free agents – central government policy and funding frameworks, and the interest and capacity of their constituent councils, are key.

Devolved powers currently vary greatly, by metro and county areas, and some MCAs might not yet be able to afford to exercise some of the powers available to them (for example bus franchising). There may also be political barriers to achieving the majority or consensus agreement required from constituent councils to exercise such powers.

Strong civil society advocacy is therefore important both for encouraging a focus on ageing and making sure it achieves impact.

The COVID-19 emergency cut both ways: it drew attention away from thinking strategically about ageing issues, but it also generated learning, especially about the ways some older people face particular barriers to contributing and about effective ways of supporting wellbeing and participation.

Knowledge and understanding are key. There is a role for ourselves and others in demonstrating that ageing cannot and should not be pigeonholed into a debate about vulnerability, health and social care. The interests and contributions of older people are vital for the economy and success of communities, whether as workers, consumers, homeowners and renters, taxpayers, care-givers or volunteers. Investment and service redesign can only be fully successful if they reflect the significance of the older population. As the older population grows, its significance in local politics can only grow.

Metro governments: what shapes their action on ageing?

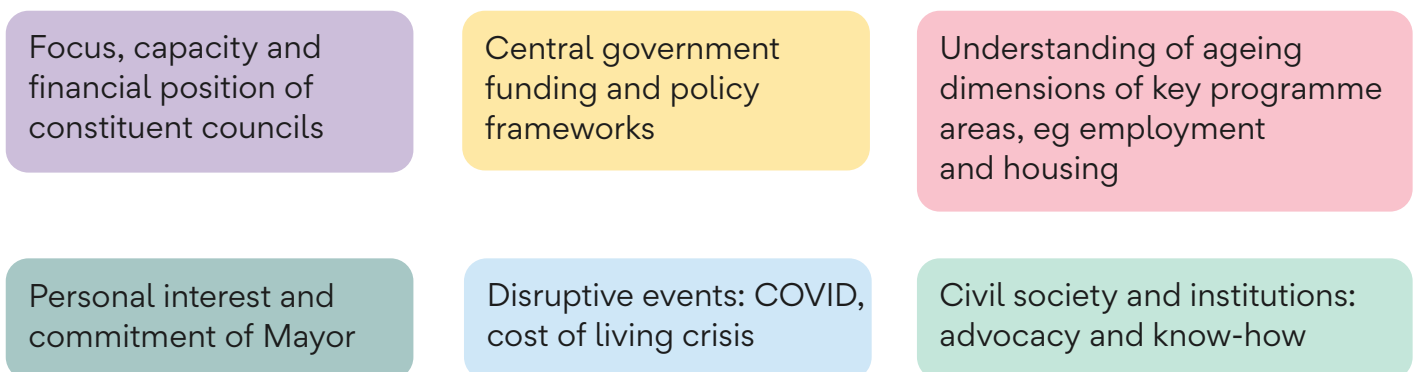


Figure 4: Factors that shape MCA actions on ageing.

Opportunities for Combined Authorities and their Mayors to increase impact

The powers, funding and programmes of MCAs are principally based on economic development, employment, housing and transport. In Greater Manchester, health and social care are also part of the devolution settlement, with the London Mayor also taking an interest in this area. Table 1 shows the opportunities there may be to address ageing

as part of programmes and investment, and some case studies of current activity by MCAs.

Beyond individual programmes, MCAs are also in a position to create regional ageing strategies. These can be based on the World Health Organisation's Age-friendly Cities Framework (Figure 5).

Table 1: Opportunities for MCAs to address ageing as part of programmes and investment.

Programme area	Opportunities	Examples
<p>Economy, Work and Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Skills development for older workers, to retain them in the workforce. - Supporting older workers returning to the workforce. - Helping long-term inactive workers enter employment. - Setting standards for good-quality working environments, including age-friendly employment practices. - Supporting self-employment and business start-ups by older entrepreneurs. - Stimulating investment by businesses in products and services that meet the needs of older adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - West of England’s Future Bright programme provides older workers with one-to-one coaching and support to progress their careers. - North of Tyne provides risk capital for innovation to meet the growing market for products and services that support ageing and healthy longevity, in partnership with the National Innovation Centre for Ageing, based at the University of Newcastle. - Greater Manchester is working with the Centre for Ageing Better and the Department for Work and Pensions to pilot and test new ways to support over 50s in getting back to work and has also published a Greater Manchester age-friendly employer handbook alongside its Good Employment Charter.

Programme area	Opportunities	Examples
<p>Economy, Work and Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marketing apprenticeships at older workers. - Responsibility for regional bids to key funding pots such as the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). 	
<p>Housing and Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promoting investment in age-friendly new housing (design and location appealing to and meeting the needs of older people). - Supporting investment in existing housing stock, especially tackling disrepair and poor energy efficiency. - Setting high targets on the accessibility of new homes and supporting their implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Liverpool City Region’s housing statement includes a theme for future-proofing housing for an ageing population, which includes accessibility in planning for new homes as well as boroughs working together on improving existing stock (of which over half is lived in by older adults). - The London Plan policy requires 90% of new-build dwellings to be built to M4(2) standards and 10% to M4(3) standards. - Stockport’s Mayoral Development Corporation has made housing for all ages a feature of its vision.
<p>Transport</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring streets and outdoor spaces are attractive, accessible and safe. - Enabling active travel schemes to consider older people in both planning and delivery. - Improving availability, suitability and accessibility of public transport for over 50s. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - West Yorkshire’s Streets for People programme is creating safe and healthy street environments, which work well for all people and help them live active, healthy lives in areas of good air quality. - Transport for London has made free off-peak travel available to those aged 60 and over with its Over 60s Oyster card scheme. - The Mayor of Liverpool City Region’s vision is to have the most accessible rail fleet in the country. Accessibility is a key feature of new trains and upgrades to stations, including through consultation with older people’s groups in the region.

Programme area	Opportunities	Examples
<p>Health and Wellbeing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preventative approaches and reductions in health inequalities. - Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering. - Communities that support active and healthy ageing at all ages. - Challenge stereotypical and negative views of ageing/ older people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater Manchester delivered over 200,000 pamphlets on staying well at home during COVID-19, for older people and those most at risk. - West Yorkshire’s Mayor has established a Dementia Ready Taskforce, to address any gaps in support for people living with dementia in West Yorkshire.

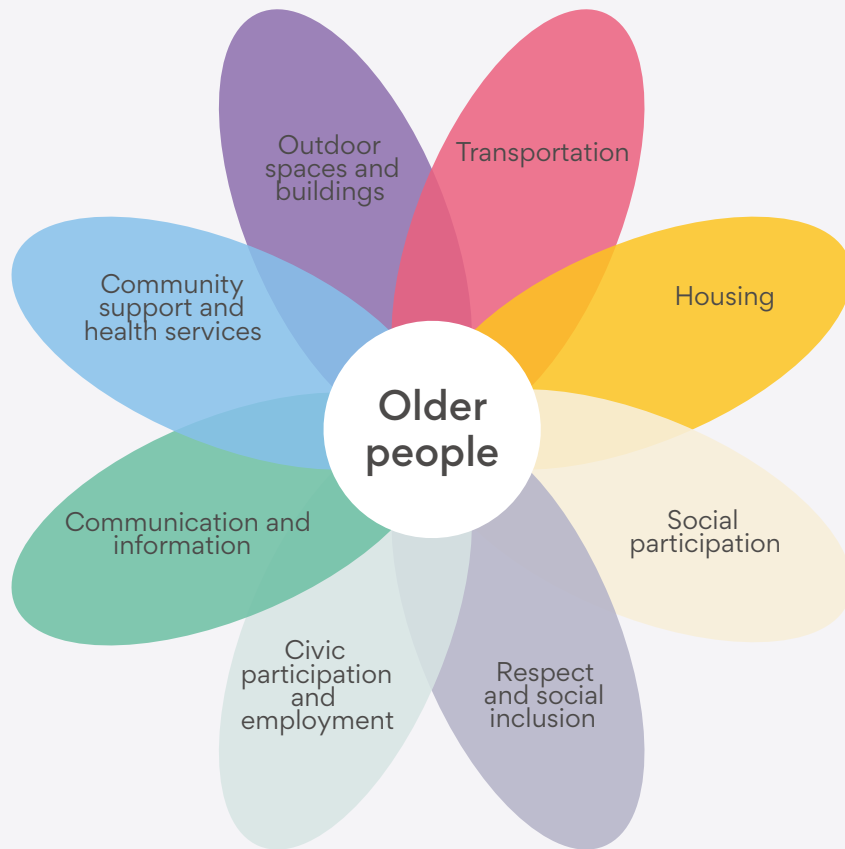


Figure 5: World Health Organisation’s eight domains for age-friendly cities and communities.

The Age-friendly Cities Framework was developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in consultation with older people. It is designed around factors that support healthy and active ageing in a community and offers a framework for places of all sizes, including counties and Combined Authorities, to make progress on key strategic areas in relation to their ageing and older populations.

The Centre for Ageing Better supports the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities, to give a platform for local areas to share and discuss what kinds of approaches work, both in the UK and internationally. Greater Manchester was the UK's first Age-friendly City Region, followed by Greater London and Liverpool City region. At the heart of this approach is engagement with local older residents alongside stakeholders in all sectors representing these domains.

“As the UK’s first Age-friendly City Region, Greater Manchester is committed to becoming one of the best places in the world to grow old.”

Andy Burnham, 2019

The framework can be adapted to align with the specific powers and strategic priorities of MCAs. The Greater Manchester Ageing Hub was set up in 2016 to lead a strategic approach to ageing in the city region and to act as a catalyst to organisations to build programmes of work. Greater Manchester’s first Age-friendly Strategy adapted the WHO framework to cover six themes that reflected opportunities and strengths of the city region.

Our offer

MCAAs are already contributing to better ageing in their areas. They have the funding and powers to do more, both in terms of ensuring that employment and skills, housing and other specific initiatives support the wellbeing and potential of older people, and, following the examples of Greater Manchester and Greater London, developing strategies that look at ageing across the piece. There is clearly now a strong tide, across the political spectrum, towards significant devolution in England, in which metro and county areas with strong directly elected leadership will figure heavily.

“With multiple centres of power, initiative and influence across the whole country, communities can see administrations more responsive to their needs.”

The Report on the Commission of the UK’s Future, Labour Party, December 2022

Ageing Better is well placed to work with metro and county area authorities and their partners, particularly around housing and employment. We have knowledge, resources and networks with practitioners on a variety of ageing issues. With existing relationships in Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and West Midlands, we also have a hands-on understanding of the context, opportunities and challenges of supporting better ageing in MCAAs.

Over the next three years we aim to engage further with Mayors, other political leaders and professionals in their authorities, member councils, other public services, businesses, and third-sector organisations in these areas. Our focus is on three main types of support:

1. Recognising that metro authorities are fairly young organisations without extensive capacity to generate their own knowledge and analysis, we can provide useful resources for people working on ageing issues in metro and county areas. In keeping with our strategic priorities, we will focus this support on employment and skills, and housing.
2. As well as generating knowledge resources, we can support networking by people leading on programmes and initiatives to share knowledge and ideas, and on building the economic evidence base for action.
3. We can offer support to Mayors and authorities with building strategies for ageing based on the WHO framework, and to incorporate key policies into their overarching strategies.

Metro and county authorities are set to become a key component of England’s governance, with huge potential to transform the lives of older people for the better. Ageing Better will do its best to enable that potential to be realised.

If you are working in or with MCAAs and want more information, contact us at localities@ageing-better.org.uk

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.

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The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone, including challenging ageism and building an Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes. It is a charitable foundation funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and part of the government's What Works Network.

