

Bath & North East Somerset Council	
MEETING:	Council
MEETING DATE:	14 May 2026
TITLE:	Expansion of WECA
WARD:	All
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
<p>List of attachments to this report:</p> <p>Please list all the appendices here, clearly indicating any which are exempt and the reasons for exemption:</p> <p>Appendix 1 - Expansion of the West of England Combined Authority: Proposal</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Consultation on North Somerset Council joining West of England Combined Authority – findings report</p>	

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The West of England Combined Authority (WECA) will meet on [5 June 2026](#) to consider a report seeking support for the Mayor to submit a proposal to Government to expand the West of England Combined Authority membership to include North Somerset Council.
- 1.2 The formal power to submit the expansion proposal sits with the Mayor and the Leader of North Somerset Council . However, Government has indicated it requires assurance that there is support for the decision from other (WECA) Committee members.
- 1.3 Council is invited to endorse the expansion proposal in advance of the WECA's [5 June 2026](#) Committee meeting.

2 RECOMMENDATION

Council is asked;

- 2.1 To indicate in principle support for the proposed expansion of the West of England Combined Authority to include North Somerset Council.**

3 THE REPORT

- 3.1 In [October 2025](#) the WECA Committee agreed to explore the potential expansion of WECA to include North Somerset Council.
- 3.2 The proposed expansion will enhance regional collaboration, unlock significant new funding streams, and ensure that all residents are fully represented in strategic decision-making.
- 3.3 North Somerset is already connected to the wider West of England economy through cross-boundary travel, business relationships, and shared infrastructure.
- 3.4 Formal inclusion will enable more integrated planning and delivery for transport, housing, skills, and economic growth, benefiting communities across Bath & North East Somerset and the region.
- 3.5 A detailed expansion proposal was developed (see appendix 1), which built on the evidence base in the West of England [Growth Strategy](#) and reflected Government policy direction on devolution and strategic authorities.
- 3.6 A further report was taken to the [January 2026](#) Committee which agreed to submit a proposal for expansion and to launch a statutory [public consultation](#). This took place from 13 February 2025 to 13 April 2026.

Consultation results

- 3.7 The consultation on membership received 1,275 responses, of which 1,268 have been included in analysis and reporting. The full published findings can be seen in **appendix 2**.

(Breakdown of responses by Constituent Authority is not available at the point of writing.)

Headlines:

- In response to the question ‘Do you believe that North Somerset Council should join WECA?’ Over half of all respondents believe that North Somerset Council should join West of England Combined Authority (57%), compared with 38% who do not believe they should join.
 - Respondents to the consultation are more likely to agree that working across a wider combined authority area will support economic growth (53%) than disagree (36%)
- 3.8 The consultation also included an opportunity for respondents to provide views regarding the proposed expansion of WECA. Based on these free text responses, a number of common themes emerged:
 - **Integration:** respondents highlighted existing strong links between North Somerset and the wider region and stated that further integration would help develop a more joined up approach to regional issues.

- **Economic benefits:** respondents highlighted improved access to funding, grant and investment opportunities and the opportunity to reduce duplication.
- **Transport:** respondents felt expansion of the Combined Authority (CA) could benefit the level of 'joined-up' transport planning, strategy and investment

3.9 Those opposed to expansion highlighted concerns that expansion could bring:

- **Limits to local control:** concerns around decision-making authority, increased bureaucracy, a re-emergence of 'Avon'
- **Economic risks:** fears around increased taxation, unfair distribution of regional funds and added pressure to North Somerset Council finances.

3.10 North Somerset Council meets on [12 May 2026](#) to consider the expansion proposal. They are recommended to “**support that the Council proceed with proposals for membership of WECA**”.

3.11 Under previous legislation, final Committee consent for expansion would have come at a later stage. Government now requires the use of the consent process as set out in the [Devolution Act](#) (which received Royal Assent on 29th April 2026). This brings the consent point forward. Under the Act, the final consent is required at the point of **submission** of the expansion proposal.

3.12 In parallel to this process WECA is looking to submit an application to Government to achieve Strategic Authority - **Established** Status. This is the top level a Mayoral Combined Authority can achieve under the new devolution framework. Established Status brings the most powers and the largest, most flexible funding from Government. It allows WECA to plan and invest over longer periods, with fewer restrictions and more local control.

Figure 1 below shows the three types of Strategic Authority, as included in the [Devolution Act](#). WECA currently sits at level two – Mayoral Strategic Authority.

Figure 1 – The three levels of Strategic Authority

Type of Strategic Authority	Mayor required?	Brief explanation of powers
Foundation Strategic Authority	No	Entry-level devolution. Focuses on strategic coordination rather than direct service control. Powers typically cover economic development, strategic transport planning, local growth priorities, and partnership working, but no large devolved funding settlements or fiscal freedoms.
Mayoral Strategic Authority (WECA's current position)	Yes	Core devolution model. Exercised through a directly elected mayor. Powers generally include transport, adult skills, housing and regeneration, economic development, and access to devolved funding pots, supported by stronger accountability arrangements.
Established Strategic Authority	Yes	Highest and most mature form of devolution. Eligible for Integrated Settlements (single, multi-year funding), greater financial flexibility, and wider strategic influence across transport, skills, housing, and economic growth. Intended as the long-term position for capable and well-governed combined authorities.

3.13 For example, in regards to increased flexibility, from financial year 2028-2029 it is hoped that WECA will benefit from an Integrated Settlement (IS). This is a single, multi-year funding pot provided by Government to an Established Mayoral Combined Authority. Instead of lots of separate grants with different rules and deadlines, the authority gets one large allocation covering areas like transport, housing, skills, regeneration, and climate. This provides much more flexibility to move money between priorities, plan for the long term, and deliver projects that best meet local needs.

3.14 Expanding WECA to include North Somerset Council enhances the bid to achieve Established Status. As WECA grows in scale and geography, Bath and North East Somerset Council will be part of a Combined Authority with maximum powers, making it easier to secure national investment.

Proposed next steps

3.15

- North Somerset Council approves expansion proposal, [12 May 2026](#)
- WECA Committee support proposal to submit formal expansion request, [5 June 2026](#)
- Government reviews the proposal against their tests before the Secretary of State confirms whether he approves the expansion progressing – anticipated this will take 4-6 weeks post submission
- Should Government confirm support, legislation will be drafted, anticipated this will take 8-12 weeks
- Once Statutory Instrument passes Parliamentary process, North Somerset Council joins WECA
- Timings may vary dependent on Parliamentary time and recess.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 The decision to expand the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) to include North Somerset Council is governed by national devolution legislation and local constitutional arrangements. The formal submission to Government for expansion requires the support of both the Mayor of WECA and the Leader of North Somerset Council, reflecting the statutory process for Combined Authority changes. Once both parties agree, a Statutory Instrument (SI) is drafted and laid before Parliament. If approved, the SI has legal effect and North Somerset Council becomes a full member of WECA.
- 4.2 Bath & North East Somerset Council retains its full rights and responsibilities as a constituent authority. The expansion does not alter the legal status or independence of B&NES, but it does mean that future strategic decisions—including those relating to funding, powers, and governance—will be taken within an expanded Combined Authority framework. The Council will continue to appoint its representatives to the Combined Authority and participate in all formal decision-making processes.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 5.1 Government has indicated its support for expansion, including a potential commitment of up to £15m of capital funding to support delivery of schemes aligned to the West of England Growth Strategy. This funding is not assumed within WECA's current budget or Medium Term Financial Strategy and would be subject to formal grant confirmation, business case approval, and the Combined Authority's established decision-making processes.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 The Combined Authority has reported that the proposed expansion presents an opportunity to embed equality and inclusion into the future operating model from the outset. By considering representation, workforce impacts and equitable access the services, the expansion can support a more inclusive regional approach that reflects the diversity of the communities served. Attention to consistent standards, transparent communication and inclusive governance will help ensure that expansion strengthens, rather than dilutes, the Combined Authority's commitment to fairness and inclusion.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 North Somerset, in common with the MCA and other Unitary Authorities, has declared a climate and a nature emergency. The MCA and North Somerset already work together in a number of ways to address these emergencies, and formal expansion of WECA would only strengthen the opportunities.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 Government has stated that a Committee decision showing support for expansion is required to provide assurance that local consent is in place. As such, there are no alternative options to consider.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 The eight-week WECA public consultation on North Somerset joining the West of England Combined Authority received 1,273 responses in total across the West of England area 56.7% of those who responded are in favour of the expansion, with 37.6% opposed, and 5.7% not sure. The public consultation ran for eight weeks closing on 13 April 2026.

10.2 Monitoring Officer (MO) and Section 151 Officer.

Sophie Broadfield – Chief Executive

Contact person	Ceri Williams – Corporate Office 01225 396053
Background papers	Appendix 1 - Expansion of the West of England Combined Authority: Proposal Appendix 2 - Consultation on North Somerset Council joining

	West of England Combined Authority – findings report
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