



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Leaders of constituent councils of the Durham,
Gateshead, Newcastle Upon Tyne, North Tyneside,
Northumberland, South Tyneside and Sunderland
Combined Authority

Brandon Lewis MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

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Our Ref:

Your Ref:

Dear Colleague

Combined authority governance and transparency

I am very pleased that the Order, which Parliament approved, has been made, establishing on 15 April 2014 your Combined Authority – an important step for achieving the jobs, investment and growth all want to see in your area.

During their recent considerations of the Combined Authority Orders Parliament gave particular attention to the Orders' provisions on the detailed governance and transparency arrangements for Combined Authorities, including provisions on overview and scrutiny committees. We undertook to write to the Leaders of all councils involved in Combined Authorities to highlight the importance of following good practice on overview and scrutiny, not least to ensure that combined authorities continue to command the confidence of all.

Good practice on overview and scrutiny enables wide cross-party representation effectively and transparently to hold to account a body's key decision takers, in the case of a combined authority essentially the Leaders of the councils concerned. The Order requires the Combined Authority overview and scrutiny committee(s) to have members drawn from the constituent councils. Following good practice will mean that members are appointed to these committees with a view to achieving political balance across the councils involved. Good practice also suggests that preferably the Chairman of an overview and scrutiny committee should not be a member of the majority political party represented in the body's decision making forum – for the Combined Authority the meeting of their members, again largely the Leaders of the councils involved. In addition, where a body follows good practice it will have proper regard to the reports and recommendations of its overview and scrutiny committee(s) such that those committee(s) not only hold the body to account for past decisions but actively influence the body's future policy.

By following good practice in these ways, the various political parties represented on all the councils concerned will have appropriate involvement and influence in the work of your Combined Authority, maintaining that wide ranging support and continuing commitment which is essential for the success of your Combined Authority.

I will place a copy of this letter on the department's website.

I would conclude by wishing you all the very best for your future collaboration and joint working through your Combined Authority – providing all the opportunities you expect for promoting growth and prosperity in your areas.

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

BRANDON LEWIS MP