Mayoral Data Council 01-10-26

Date: 1 October 2026

Time: 13:00-16:00

Location: Glasshouse Restaurant, Darlington College, Haughton Road, Darlington, DL1 1DR

Chair: Katherine Fairclough (KF) - LCRCA

Vice Chair: Jules Ient (JI) - CPCA

Attendees: Martine Wauben (MW) - GLA; Shelley Harrod (SH) - EMCA; Chris Pope (CP) - GMCA; John Curtis (JC) - GMCA; Simon Bishop (SB) - HEYCA; Kate Downes (KD) - LCRCA; Katarina Olausson (KO) - NECA; Nick Brailsford (NB) - SYMCA; Kate Mieske (KM) - SYMCA; Anthony Ruddy (AR) - TVCA; Elaine Fryett (EF) - TVCA; Jonathan Spruce (JS) - TVCA; Bob O'Brien (BO) - WECA; Si Chun Lam (SL) - WMCA; Patrick Bowes (PB) - WYCA; Andrew Leeming (AL) - YNYCA.

Presenters: Beth Russell (BR) - HMT; Phil Swan (PS) - DCMS; Jenny Brooker (JB) - DCMS; Will Garner (WG) - DWP; Tony Wilson (TW) - DWP; Teneeka Mai (TM) - No10.

Observers: Sarah Tomlinson (ST) - CO; Tom Smith (TS) - MHCLG; Michelle Mullarkey (MM) - MHCLG; Louise Jakobsson (LJ) - MHCLG; Rosie Cornelius (RC) - MHCLG;Kat Sexton (KS) - MHCLG; Lewis Casey (LC) - MHCLG; Adam Suleiman (AS) - MHCLG; Jennet Woolford (JW) - ONS; Sam Nutt (SN) - GDS; John Kelly (JK) - DfE.

Secretariat: Nick Webster (NW) - MHCLG; Isis Joseph-Brimfield (IB) - MHCLG.

Action Log:

No.	Action	Status	Owner	Update
5.6	MDC secretariat to work with DSIT on making links between working groups across central and local government.	Ongoing	Jules Ient	This is an active strand of work which we expect to continue to expand
5.16	Establish MDC–CADPAIR task and finish group	Ongoing	John Curtis	Working with CADPAIR secretariat on sequencing for this
6.1	GDS to continue engagement with MDC as the digital and data pillar is refined	New	Phil Swan	
6.2	MDC to develop proposal for updated Terms of Reference and operating model to strengthening its mandate, sponsorship, capacity and expertise	New	All members	
6.3	MDC members to work with Chair and secretariat to seek support, input and sign-off from CEXs on new MDC model	New	All members	
6.4	MDC secretariat to work with BR to explore secondments and resource-	New	Nick Webster	

	sharing arrangements between central government and MSAs.			
6.5	MDC NEETs working group to continue to support the development of Project JUDE offer, including providing capability requirements and proposed use cases.	New	Kate Downes	
6.6	Project JUDE team to begin engagement with wave-one MSA teams, and to follow up with wave-two engagement, expected to follow in early November.	New	Teneeka Mai	
6.7	Data maturity workstream to develop the proposed light touch assessment	New	Katarina Olausson	
6.8	Data Mapping workstream to redefine its scope based on where it can add best value	New	Shelley Harrod	
6.9	Members to share final funding proposals by end of October	New		
6.10	MDC Secretariat and workstream leads to review MDC Strategic Plan and Terms of Reference as MDCs role evolves	New	Isis Joseph-Brimfield	

Summary of discussion

Item 1: Opening, welcome and strategic context

KF welcomed members and attendees to Darlington and noted the timely opportunity for MDC to come together and consider its future direction.

JS welcomed attendees on behalf of TVCA to the region and provided an overview of recent activity across Tees Valley. This included the publication of the local growth plan, endorsement of an inward investment strategy, approval of a local transport delivery plan representing around £1 billion of investment over the next five years, and progress across apprenticeship and rough sleeping programmes.

Discussion highlighted the opportunity for the Tees Valley data and intelligence team to make greater use of digital capability and data to support the delivery of services for residents, visitors and businesses.

Item 2: Strategic implications of the White Paper: Rewiring the State for data and devolution

BR opened the item with reflections on the importance of data in enabling effective devolution, while noting that discussions across central, regional and local government had highlighted a number of unresolved barriers that would need to be addressed. BR provided an update on the development of the digital and data pillar of the Rewiring the State Delivery Plan, including ongoing work to align it with wider reform and capability priorities. She also highlighted the

growing government presence in Darlington, including the expansion of HM Treasury and the development of a new government hub.

PS provided an update on the development of the digital and data pillar of the Rewiring the State Delivery Plan. He noted that an initial draft had recently been submitted following extensive engagement throughout September and would now be refined alongside the wider public service reform, capability and other delivery pillars.

Discussion Points

- Future role of the MDC: JI as MDC Vice Chair, outlined the MDC members joint position for MDC to become the primary vehicle for MSAs to provide strategic steer on issues of data, digital and AI supporting delivery of the Rewiring the State Delivery Plan. This builds on MDC's established role and ability to bring together perspectives and expertise on data from across the mayoral system. It was emphasised that this would require a clear mandate and formal relationship with central government, senior sponsorship, additional resource and delivery capacity, and a delivery model that reflects differences in capability and maturity across areas.
- Digital, data and AI as enabling capabilities: There was agreement that digital, data and AI are interlinked and should underpin devolution and public service reform rather than being treated as separate or standalone issues.
- Connecting national ambition with local delivery: The digital and data pillar needs to reflect the practical role of strategic authorities and local government in delivering services. This includes recognising significant differences in maturity, capability and capacity between areas.
- Moving from strategy into delivery: Members emphasised the need for tangible delivery - foundations, scalable approaches and practical use cases should be progressed in parallel rather than waiting for all technical and governance foundations to be completed first.
- Capacity and capability: Capacity and capability were identified as fundamental barriers to delivery. It was emphasised that support should extend beyond those directly involved in digital and data and reach senior leaders, and other colleagues responsible for transformation and delivery. There was also a discussion about how MDC and central government can tackle common capability challenges, including how MDC can help support joint approaches, and where national responses were needed. There was also interest in making more use of the current secondment scheme from central government to MSAs.
- Evaluation and evidence: Digital and data investment should be accompanied by evaluation and research capability so that areas can understand the impact of interventions and feed learning back.
- Need for prioritisation: The Rewiring the State delivery plan should focus on initiatives that can make the greatest difference over the next two years, recognising that some existing activity may need to stop or change to create capacity.
- Existing funding and investment: Members noted the importance of making effective use of funding already available through the current Spending Review while preparing for the next Spending Review process. It was recognised that significant future funding requirements would need to be identified early enough to inform future submissions.

Action(s):

- 6.1 GDS to continue engagement with MDC as the digital and data pillar is refined
- 6.2 MDC to develop proposal for updated Terms of Reference and operating model to strengthening its mandate, sponsorship, capacity and expertise

- 6.3 MDC members to work with Chair and secretariat to seek support, input and sign-off from CEXs on new MDC model
- 6.4 MDC secretariat to work with BR is about explore secondments and resource-sharing arrangements between central government and MSAs.

Item 3: Strategic opportunities from the Milburn Review

TW presented an overview of the Milburn Review and its emerging proposals for reforming support for young people. The upcoming review proposes a more integrated and locally led system for young people. This was intended to enable local areas to join up support and better meet local needs, strengthen accountabilities for outcomes, and address the complexity, cliff edges and gaps in the current system that often require young people to navigate multiple services and repeatedly provide the same information as they move between education, benefits and employment support.

WG and TM provided an update on Project JUDE, the emerging data offer intended to support the delivery of the Local Apprenticeship Service and wider work relating to young people who are not in education, employment or training. The programme aims to bring together education, skills, apprenticeship, employment and benefits data from across government to support both operational delivery and wider regional labour market analysis.

It was noted that the initial use case would focus on identifying young people who may be eligible for support and matching them with suitable apprenticeship opportunities. This would provide a controlled environment in which to address wider issues relating to data access, legal gateways, security, data matching and operational use. To support this, MSA analysts would have access to a secure government environment containing pseudonymised data. Later phases could make data available through data feeds or APIs, enabling MSAs to integrate it into their own platforms and operational services, supported by appropriate governance and technical arrangements.

Discussion Points

- Better services for young people: It was highlighted that better joined-up data could support a more coordinated service for young people as they move between education, training and employment.
- Uses of the JUDE data: Members identified four broad uses for the JUDE data including understanding NEET risk factors; understanding the support available; identifying people who may need support and the services that could help them; and evaluating the impact of interventions.
- Support for initial use case: There was support for maintaining a clear and focused initial use case rather than attempting to resolve every data challenge through the first phase. The apprenticeship brokerage work could act as a demonstrator for wider devolution and cross-government data sharing.
- Enabling wider data sharing: Discussion highlighted that realising the wider opportunities from improved data sharing would depend on having the right legislative framework in place to enable MSAs to access and use data effectively. This would need to be underpinned by shared approaches to privacy by design. It was also noted that the Combined Authority Data

Protection and Information Rights (CADPAIR) forum was available to advise on legislative issues and assurance frameworks, and could bring relevant matters to a future agenda.

- Combining national and local data: It was suggested that government data should be combined with information held locally so that products reflect both strategic policy interests and practical delivery needs.
- Capability and capacity: Members highlighted MSAs have different levels of analytical capability, technical infrastructure and capacity. It was highlighted that onboarding and ongoing technical support was welcome, but that support will need to be proportionate to each area's starting point.
- Wider datasets: Members highlighted the potential value of incorporating additional health, local authority and looked-after children data to provide a fuller picture of young people's needs.
- Hosting and scalability: It was suggested consideration should be given to whether a cross-government initiatives, such as the National Data Library, could offer a more scalable hosting model than recreating arrangements within individual departments for each new use case.

Action(s):

- 6.5 MDC NEETs working group to continue to support the development of Project JUDE offer, including providing capability requirements and proposed use cases.
- 6.6 Project JUDE team to begin engagement with wave-one MSA teams, and to follow up with wave-two engagement, expected to follow in early November.

Item 4: MDC Regular Business - Workstream Progress and Strategic Alignment

Terms of Reference

JI highlighted the amended MDC Terms of Reference, reflecting the agreement at the previous MDC meeting to invite Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) areas to join as observing members, with the option to become full Council members when they had sufficient capacity. Members confirmed they were content with the revised changes.

It was recognised that the Terms of Reference may need to be revisited as MDC's role evolves through Rewiring the State and as new priorities and delivery arrangements emerge.

MDC Workstreams

JI gave updates from the six MDC workstreams (knowledge exchange, NEETs, statistics, data maturity, data mapping and information governance), highlighting that the workstreams were beginning to move from defining scope and membership towards practical outputs.

- Data maturity: The data maturity workstream proposed that members undertake light-touch, high-level data maturity assessments to establish a consistent baseline across members, while also capturing any assessment activity already undertaken and its outcomes. It was noted that DfT and MHCLG Digital Planning had expressed an interest in supporting the work, although further detail was needed on the nature and scope of that support.

- Data Mapping: The workstream proposed refocusing its activity, recognising that its original purpose had become less clear within the evolving Rewiring the State landscape. Members agreed that the workstream should not continue where there was a risk of producing outdated or less relevant outputs. It was noted that greater clarity on the future direction of the work was expected to emerge as the RWS agenda unfolds.
- Statistics: The workstream highlighted the need to prioritise the statistics and data products most urgently required by MSAs, particularly in response to central government requests. Members also discussed whether common data standards for place-based outcomes should be developed collectively.

MDC Funding

It was highlighted the MDC had funding available to support delivery for this financial year, but decisions were required soon to allow proposals to be developed and funding to be used within the required timescales.

Suggested proposals for council considerations include:

- Discovery work relating to spatial development strategies.
- Improved access to academic journals
- Funding to build shared analytical or delivery capacity; and support to backfill MSA staff time for collective MDC activity.

Members favored exploring propositions that could build collective capacity. It was agreed that further propositions would be developed into business cases for consideration for final decision.

MDC Strategy

Members agreed that in light of the emerging RWS Delivery Plan the MDC Strategic Plan should be reviewed to ensure it remains focused on the areas where work can add the greatest value.

Action(s):

- 6.7 Data maturity workstream to develop the proposed light touch assessment
- 6.8 Data Mapping workstream to redefine its scope based on where it can add best value
- 6.9 Members to share final funding proposals by end of October
- 6.10 MDC Secretariat and workstream leads to review MDC Strategic Plan and Terms of Reference as MDCs role evolves

Item 5: AOB and next steps

The meeting ended reflecting on substantial progress across Rewiring the State, Project JUDE and MDC's wider workstreams. Members emphasised the need to maintain momentum while identifying and prioritising work that could deliver the greatest impact.

The next MDC meeting was highlighted as expecting to take place in late January to early February, with emphasis on working groups reconvening before then to maintain progress on specific areas.

Action(s):

6.11 MDC Secretariat to confirm arrangements for the next MDC meeting, expected to take place in February.