

Double Devolution – What does it mean for Macclesfield

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the concept of *double devolution* and outlines the potential benefits for Macclesfield, its residents and the Town Council.

What is Double Devolution?

Double devolution refers to the transfer of decision-making powers, responsibilities, and in some cases funding, from central government to principal authorities (such as unitary or county councils) and then further down to the most local tier of government—Town and Parish Councils.

The purpose of double devolution is to ensure that decisions about local services and community assets are made as close as possible to the communities they affect. This approach supports more responsive, accountable, and locally informed governance.

In practical terms, double devolution may involve the transfer of responsibility for many different types of services from Cheshire East Council to the Town Council, for example parks, open spaces, community buildings, grounds maintenance, or other local services traditionally managed by the principal authority.

Double devolution presents significant opportunities for Town and Parish Councils and its residents. By bringing decisions and services closer to the community, the Town Council can enhance the quality, responsiveness, and relevance of local provision, while strengthening local engagement and stewardship.

Possible Benefits for Local Residents

Community-Focused Services

Residents benefit from services designed around local priorities, offering a more relevant and targeted approach to community needs.

Accessible Decision-Making

Town and Parish Councils are the most accessible tier of government. Residents can easily raise concerns or suggestions and engage directly with decision-makers.

Improved Quality of Local Facilities

Local responsibility for parks, buildings, and amenities typically leads to higher standards of upkeep and quicker response to issues.

Stronger Community Engagement

Double devolution can foster increased participation from community groups, volunteers, and residents, strengthening local identity and cohesion.

Opportunities for Innovation

Localised control enables creative and community-led solutions that larger authorities may not have the capacity or flexibility to deliver.

Benefits for the Macclesfield Town Council

Greater Local Control

The Town Council gains direct control over assets and services within the community, allowing decisions to reflect local priorities rather than broader authority-wide considerations.

Faster Decision-Making

With fewer layers of governance, the Council can make timely and responsive decisions, improve service delivery and enabling quick action where required.

Tailored Services

The Council's close understanding of its community enables it to tailor services and improvements to local needs more effectively than a distant authority.

Improved Stewardship of Assets

Local management often results in better upkeep, as maintenance schedules and investment decisions are made with direct awareness of community expectations.

Enhanced Strategic Influence

Transferring responsibilities strengthens the Town Council's role within the local governance framework and increases its influence in wider community planning discussions.

Macclesfield Town Councils Track Record

Since its inception in 2015, Macclesfield Town Council (MTC) has shown a strong commitment to supporting, protecting and sometimes taking over services/assets traditionally provided by Cheshire East Council (CEC). The Town Council wishes to continue supporting services that are vital to the town and its residents.

This includes providing financial contributions for services particularly important to local residents, examples are as follows:

- Introduction of Ranger service
- Christmas Lights
- Allotments
- Remembrance and Armistice
- Town Centre Community Events
- Town Centre Promotion
- Contribution to Library/ Visitor Information centre
- Contribution to CCTV services
- Contribution to Parks and Play areas
- Gritting extra roads and providing and filling extra grit boxes.

However, rather than simply providing funds to CEC without influence, MTC seeks to have a direct role in shaping efficiencies and improvements—areas where the Council has demonstrated expertise. In this context, double devolution presents an exciting opportunity for the Town Council.

Considerations for Service or Asset Transfer

Before taking on additional services or assets, MTC must carefully assess several key areas. Understanding community needs is essential, identifying which services residents value most, along with services that are currently underperforming or at risk of closure and could particularly benefit from local management.

Capacity is an important consideration. MTC currently employs six staff members, and any transfer of services will increase staffing requirements. This may involve TUPE or new recruitment to replace staff who do not wish to transfer. To manage this effectively, a phased approach is recommended, whereby the Council initially takes on part of a service and expands responsibilities gradually over time. This ensures capacity is planned, controlled, and sustainable.

Premises are another consideration, by Jan 2026 we will have one office that can house double the staff, however further premises may well be needed depending on which services could be transferred.

Financial implications must also be carefully assessed. CEC would need to provide current expenditure figures for any service or asset under consideration. While MTC already contributes financially to some services, full transfer could lead to significant increases in the town precept. To mitigate the impact on residents, a phased approach with tapering funding from CEC over several years would allow the precept to grow gradually, while still achieving savings for CEC.

Legal and regulatory considerations are equally important. The Council would require robust legal support to review TUPE arrangements, contracts, liabilities, and insurance requirements for any services that are transferred. Strategic fit must also be considered, evaluating whether the service aligns with MTC's priorities, including local wellbeing, sustainability, and community engagement. Potential synergies with existing services should be identified to improve efficiency.

Finally, any transfer should include a thorough risk assessment to identify financial, operational, and reputational risks, and strategies should be developed to mitigate these. Pilot projects may be a valuable way to test feasibility before full transfer, with lessons learned guiding future expansion.

Next Steps

The Town Clerk has met with clerks from other larger councils in Cheshire East to discuss the opportunities and challenges of double devolution. While each Town Council has different capacities and priorities for what they might wish to take on, there is scope to establish strong guidelines outlining what councils need from CEC in order to consider service or asset transfers, including expected timelines.

Key requirements for MTC to consider any transfer include:

- Clear financial information regarding the cost of an asset or service.
- Possibility of tapering financial support for transferred services and assets.
- Opportunities for trials or pilot projects.
- Timely legal information, including leases and contracts.
- Clearly identified contacts for information.

These points are essential if the Town Council is to seriously consider taking on new responsibilities. In previous transfers, such as the South Park Pavilion asset transfer, obtaining the necessary information has proven slower and more complex than expected, and progress on agreed matters like the maintenance of the Macc on Foot project equipment has been limited. While CEC is supportive in principle of exploring double devolution, careful planning and the right level of support will help achieve a smooth and successful implementation.

Meetings with councils of a similar size and capacity will continue, with the dual purpose of producing guidelines and providing a collective voice for what the Town Council needs from CEC and sharing knowledge and advice as more services are considered for transfer. Engagement with ChALC and CEC led meetings will ensure the Town Council remains aware of the approaches and frameworks CEC intends to implement.

Proposals:

- To oversee this process, the Council proposes establishing a small Devolution Committee, comprising the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk, and councillor representatives. This Committee will keep the full council informed and, when appropriate, make recommendations on which services or assets should be transferred.
- The Town Clerk to prepare a plan for Full Council, looking at taking the current Rangers staff under MTC management directly including equipment storage and operational arrangements. Not only will this to provide experience in managing TUPE transfers it will lay the foundation for future service devolution.