

Liverpool Daily Post

Merseyside councils 'must work together'

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By Robert Merrick, Daily Post



MERSEYSIDE will only match the economic miracle of Manchester when its local authorities co-operate rather than compete, the author of a key report to the Government claimed yesterday.

The "State of the English Cities" study hailed the renaissance of places such as Liverpool, which had closed the gap with London since the late-1990s.

But the report also highlighted how Manchester was soaring ahead of its North West rival in wealth created, employment growth and its success in developing "economic niches".

While most urban areas in the North still lagged behind their counterparts in the South, Manchester was among a select group "leading the national economy", it concluded.

Its gross value added (GVA) per head had risen by 58% since 1995, compared with the 47% achieved by the Liverpool "primary urban area", which includes Knowsley and St Helens.

Professor Michael Parkinson of Liverpool John Moores University, who carried out the study, stressed the value of dynamic local leadership and co-operation between local partners.

Speaking to the Daily Post at Westminster, the professor said: "Ten years ago, Manchester bullied the other authorities in the metropolitan area, but that has changed now.

"They understand that it is all about doing deals - I'll give you this if you will give me that - rather than the authorities being in competition with each other.

"It is something the authorities in Merseyside need to copy if they are to prevent themselves lagging behind Manchester.

"In Germany, they call it the 'chapel steeple approach', everything that can be seen from the steeple on top of the chapel is your patch."

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[◀ Previous](#) [1](#) [2](#)

The 267-page report focused on the 56 English urban areas with populations above 150,000, which include Birkenhead, taking in Wirral, Ellesmere Port and Neston and Warrington.

It highlighted how Liverpool, along with London, had suffered the biggest loss of manufacturing jobs since 1991, but was now a "high-flier" in financial services. Unlike the capital, the outer areas of Liverpool had outperformed the centre since 1997 and it still had "by far the highest level of deprivation" of any of the 56 areas.

Almost half of the neighbourhoods in Liverpool are in the poorest 10% in the country, double the proportion in Birmingham and Manchester.

Liverpool also had the dubious distinction of claiming the highest proportion of jobless citizens and was fourth worst for educational performance of children.

Although Liverpool is only four places behind Manchester in the European league table for gross domestic product (GDP) per head, its figure is just £16,466, compared to its rival's £22,099.

The study will feed in to government moves to devolve powers to the big cities, possibly to be overseen by elected mayors for "city regions".



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A report last month by a political think-tank concluded Liverpool was not ready for greater tax-raising

powers because political infighting had sapped business trust in the city council.

'They already do'

THE claim that Mersey authorities were not co-operating closely enough was instantly rejected by the body charged with winning vital investment to the area.

Robert Crawford, chief executive of The Mersey Partnership, insisted he was hugely impressed by the joint working of local authority leaders since taking up the post in September.

And he suggested the reason why Merseyside still lagged behind Manchester economically was simply that it had "a longer road to travel".

The Daily Post reported last month the attack by St Helens council leader Marie Rimmer on her Liverpool neighbours for failing the Merseyside region.

The Labour leader accused the city of a lack of leadership and delivery because of its "two egos" - former council leader Mike Storey and departing chief executive Sir David Henshaw.

But Mr Crawford said: "The professor is entitled to his view but I have been incredibly encouraged by the support and co-operation I have encountered.

"If you consider where Liverpool and Manchester have come from in less than a generation, Liverpool has to travel a longer road and has done quite brilliantly."

Fogarty welcomes report's findings

LIAM FOGARTY, chairman of amayorforliverpool.org, the campaign trying to trigger a referendum on an elected mayor for the city, welcomed the findings of the report.

Mr Fogarty said: "The case for real reform and real leadership for Liverpool is growing stronger day by day.

"Take a trip to Barcelona, or Madrid, or Cologne and see how far behind those places we are.

"Those cities and many like them have visible, accountable leaders who have a vision for their city and the powers to see that vision through. Our system of local decision-making is a muddle of quangoes, part-time politicians and unelected officials. No wonder Liverpool gets left in the slow lane."