

Cameron devolves range of powers to Cornwall

John Murray Brown & Andrew Bounds

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Cornwall is to become the first English county to benefit from devolution, with David Cameron announcing plans to transfer control over transport, adult skills and investment during a visit to the region on Thursday.

The prime minister described it as a “major shift for the people who live and work in Cornwall — putting power in their hands and giving them the tools to take charge and make the most of the fantastic potential that Cornwall holds”.

John Pollard, leader of Cornwall council and an independent, said it was “brilliant news”.

Even Dick Cole, councillor and leader of the separatist Mebyon Kernow, the party of Cornwall, was broadly supportive and particularly welcomed moves to allow locals to decide how to spend the €600m Cornwall receives over five years from Brussels as the only part of England still eligible for EU aid.

“This is welcome as we do suffer a lot because government departments argue amongst themselves rather than letting local politicians and business decide on how the money should be spent,” Mr Cole said.

The announcement should help the Conservatives consolidate their grip on local politics in the peninsula after the party’s clean sweep of the six Cornish seats in May’s general election.

The cities and local government devolution bill is currently passing through parliament and puts in place the legal framework across the country that will make it simpler for devolving more powers to more places.

The bill sets out far-reaching powers to be [devolved to Greater Manchester](#) and for creating a citywide elected “metro mayor” who will provide strong leadership and a clear vision.

The government has been clear that strong leadership needs to be in place for areas seeking additional powers.

But unlike in urban areas of the North and Midlands, where the government has made it a precondition that regions agree to directly elected mayors to maximise the powers on offer from Whitehall, the new powers for Cornwall are being transferred to existing bodies such as the council and the local enterprise partnership.

In doing so, Cornwall has leapfrogged [Sheffield and Leeds](#), which are in talks for similar deals. They and many other cities remain reluctant to accept the government’s demand for an elected mayor in return for powers.

Labour and Liberal Democrat peers removed the requirement for mayors from the devolution bill in a Lords vote this week, but it is likely to be reinstated by the Commons.

Greg Clark, the communities secretary, said the deal for Cornwall would be “the first of many devolution deals for counties around the country as part of our long-term economic plan”.

However, the CBI business lobby group voiced a note of caution about the prospects for further devolution. “Our challenge back to government has always been to articulate how this will help boost growth. Where democratic will and economic impact meet — that’s the devolution sweet spot. Further devolution will only be sustainable if it ticks both boxes.”

Cornwall council will be in charge of how funding from the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund is spent, which will allow it to select projects from April 2016. It will also take over responsibility for franchising bus services from 2018.

