

In my previous column I wrote about our Annual Council meeting here in St Helens, and this week it's the turn of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to hold its AGM.

The meeting will see the formal appointment of the cabinet which is made up of the six leaders from St Helens, Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral, and chaired by the Metro Mayor Steve Rotheram. I'll be continuing to lead on our regional response to climate change with the Net Zero and Air Quality portfolio.

We're doing good work on this both in St Helens and in the region, with one good example being the recent launch of our hydrogen-powered buses. They're publicly owned, and with the consultation on bus franchising also currently underway we're showing our commitment not just to improving the environment but to delivering quality public transport for people not profit.

I've also been invited to take up the (unpaid) additional role of Deputy Metro Mayor, which is great recognition for the work St Helens is doing at a regional level.

I know some are sceptical about the City Region and worry it means we might lose our identity, but like other devolution areas in Greater Manchester and elsewhere it was set up to draw powers down from Westminster, not take them away from councils or towns.

We haven't lost any independence by becoming a member of the City Region – in fact we have a louder voice than ever, with far more influence at a regional and national level than we would ever have on our own.

As for what it's done for St Helens, in the few years the City Region has existed we've been successful in securing millions in funding to deliver major projects including Glass Futures, Parkside colliery redevelopment, the new Lea Green station, and the upcoming new bus station in St Helens town centre – a key part of our regeneration plans.

Through the City Region we've also secured more than £5m for brownfield redevelopment, and we've received funding for massive investment in skills and training to help people into work - including nearly £5m just this year for adult education.

All this and more is support that St Helens simply wouldn't have got without devolution, and we're working hard to grow our influence, not shrink it.

Best wishes to all Star readers.