Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 27ʰ March 2026

Subject: Realising GM's ambition as the UK Prevention and AI Demonstrator
              City Region: Establishment of a GM Data Unit and AI.GM

Report of: Councillor Nick Peel, Portfolio Lead for Digital City-
              Region and Stephen Young, Portfolio Lead Chief Executive
              for Digital City-Region

Purpose of Report

To provide an update on progress to realise the ambition to position Greater Manchester as an AI Demonstrator city region to enable a more preventative approach to public service delivery.

To set out a proposal for the establishment a GM Data Unit to further this ambition.

To update on development of AI.GM as an overarching entity.

Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Endorse the principle of a GM Data Unit to provide system leadership on joining up data and complement the work of the Joint Data Collaborative .

2. Receive a future detailed proposition and delivery model for a GM Data Unit

3. Note the progress and ongoing development of AI.GM and intention to secure system leadership to enable future development

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Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

Recommendation - Key points for decision-makers

Based on the decision tool we recommend that the proposal to develop a GM Data Unit is progressed to realise the identified benefits

Impacts Questionnaire

Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation
Equality and Inclusion	G	The GM Data Unit will focus on improving public service outcomes for all and particularly those who are socially and economically disadvantaged. GMCA will embed ethical and transparent use of data to ensure equality and inclusion is a core principles of a Data Unit
Health	G	By enabling earlier intervention and prevention through data-driven decision making, the GM Data Unit will improve physical and mental health and well-being of residents.
Resilience and Adaptation	G	By enabling better data-driven decision making, monitoring and risk assessment, ensuring that safety and security are embedded in our digital public services, will improve resilience and reduce vulnerability.
Housing	G	This proposal could enable better targeted interventions on a range of housing policy priorities including homelessness, safe and healthy homes and better use of unused buildings.
Economy	N/A	This proposal will support growth of the data economy, thus improving growth and productivity and creating new jobs. The proposal would link closely to our digital skills programmes to ensure data skills across the city region
Mobility and Connectivity	G	This proposal will rely on robust and resilient digital connectivity and will support digitally-enabled smart transport sytems and methods for managing congestion. There could be a short-term negative effect on affordability of digital services, but this is not conclusive.
Carbon, Nature and Environment	A	The proposal could have a no discernable direct environmental impact but better use of data has the potential to better identify and target carbon reduction interventions
Consumption and Production	A	Data enabled efficiencies could help prevent waste through smarter production and consumption decisions
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		

Further Assessment(s):   Equalities Impact Assessment and Carbon Assessment

G	Positive impacts overall, whether long or short term.	A	Mix of positive and negative impacts. Trade-offs to consider.	R	Mostly negative, with at least one positive aspect. Trade-offs to consider.	RR	Negative impacts overall.

Risk Management

The risk associated with the AI Demonstrator remain as set out in the report of May 2025

Legal Considerations

n/a

Financial Consequences – Revenue

Mobilising a GM Data Unit will initially draw on existing resources.

Financial Consequences – Capital

n/a

Number of attachments to the report: ?

Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee

n/a

Background Papers

GMCA Part A Report Template

5A GMS Delivery Plan Summary Updated for CA 17.11.25.pdf

Tracking/ Process

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

Exemption from call in

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

Bee Network Committee

n/a

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

n/a

1. Background

1.1   In May 2025 the CA received a paper setting out the ambition to position Greater Manchester as an AI Demonstrator City region. The Demonstrator would seek to advance and realise the benefits of AI in several connected ways, aligning with the Prevention Demonstrator.

1.2   The intent is to take a holistic and place-based approach to maximising the value of AI, and data, in a collaborative way recognising the distinct but inter-dependent nature of AI and data

That paper proposed a number of components to deliver the AI Demonstrator, including:

- An AI and Digital Innovation Office (ADIO)

- AI.GM

- Joint Data Unit

1.3   Since endorsement by the CA in May an AI and Data Innovation Office (ADIO) has now been successfully mobilised and is enabling collaboration across the GM system on 6 projects to accelerate AI adoption. The initial focus of the ADIO is on AI to improve productivity and has exposed the need for more dedicated capacity to consider the data required to maximise AI impact and enable prevention.

1.4   This paper sets out a proposition for the development of Joint Data Unit and updates on wider progress of AI.GM.

1.5   Other elements of the AI Demonstrator set out in the May 2025 paper including the AI Growth Zone and Grow AI (formerly AI Connect) are covered within AI.GM, section 3.

2. Context

As the Prevention Demonstrator for the UK (as identified in the NHS 10 year plan) GM is uniquely placed to demonstrate how data, and digital capabilities including AI, can enable preventative public service delivery.

For examples, the GM Care Record is one of a number of critical data asset that GM can leverage in pursuit of this ambition, with its sector leading data sharing processes
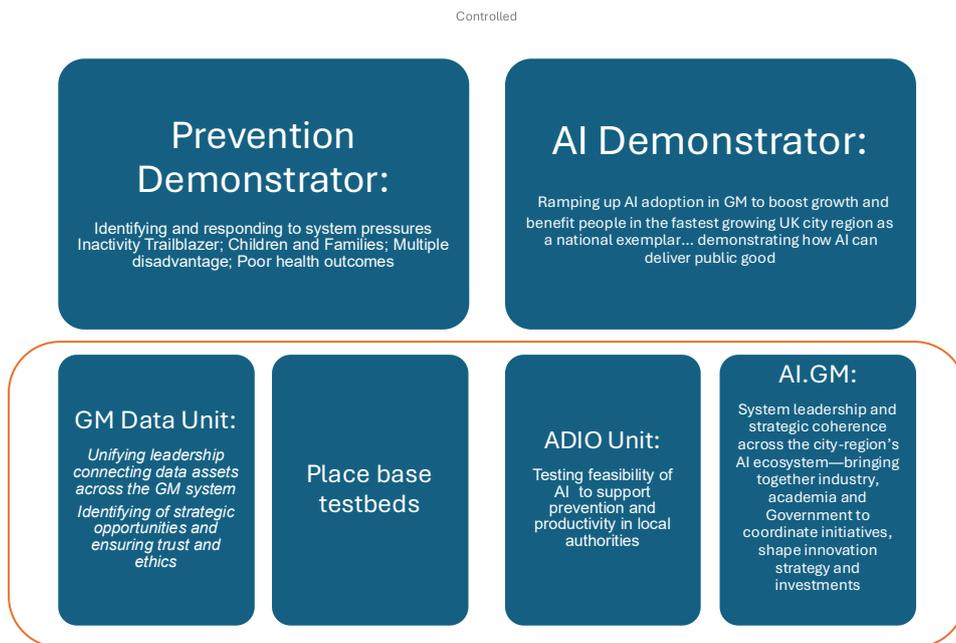
developed by health and care partners which acknowledge and respond to the rights of data subjects and responsibilities of data controllers. .Building on this approach and existing models, whole system leadership across both Data and AI, with a focus on maintaining the trust, confidence and resilience will be critical realising this value and pioneering new ways of working.

Across GM sectors and localities there are a range of initiatives in progress to harness the value of data and AI in support of prevention and other local priorities.

The GM Data Unit and AI.GM would bring together existing stakeholders, provide leadership for the respective domains and harness expertise of the respective data and AI ecosystems, whilst ensuring synergies, a robust interface and avoidance of duplication.

Figure 1 illustrates this relationship and the interface with other components of the AI Demonstrator delivery model.

Figure1: GM as a Prevention and AI Demonstrator:

Controlled

Prevention Demonstrator:

Identifying and responding to system pressures Inactivity Trailblazer; Children and Families; Multiple disadvantage; Poor health outcomes

AI Demonstrator:

Ramping up AI adoption in GM to boost growth and benefit people in the fastest growing UK city region as a national exemplar... demonstrating how AI can deliver public good

GM Data Unit:

Unifying leadership connecting data assets across the GM system

Identifying of strategic opportunities and ensuring trust and ethics

Place base testbeds

ADIO Unit:

Testing feasibility of AI to support prevention and productivity in local authorities

AI.GM:

System leadership and strategic coherence across the city-region's AI ecosystem—bringing together industry, academia and Government to coordinate initiatives, shape innovation strategy and investments

3. Data Unit

3.1 Ambition & Opportunity

3.1.1 The Greater Manchester Strategy (GMS) sets out how GM will "embed digital in the design of all public services, ensuring public servants have the skills to realise the benefits of new technologies. We'll use technology to enhance productivity and to build responsible, data-driven public services, driving collaboration across sectors

to build a smarter, more connected city region that enhances the quality of life for all its residents".

3.1.2 The ambitions of the Live Well model and Prevention Demonstrator also depend on ability of data to be joined up and shared across services to break down silos and provide a person-centred approach. The city region's data assets also provide opportunities to support GM's Good Growth model, including through the growth of key sectors such as health innovation.

3.1.3 The achievement of the ambitions set out in the GMS therefore requires GM to develop a model of data sharing which leads national practice and provides a blueprint for other areas. The setting up of a Joint Data Unit is therefore proposed which provides system leadership, facilitates collaboration and develops expertise on this agenda for the GM system. It would pioneer a new data management model for city regions, that puts trust and ethics at its heart and enables the GM system to exploit data to drive better outcomes for our people

3. 2 Purpose and Progress to Date

3.2.1 A Joint Data Unit was initially conceived as a collaboration between GM and His Majesty's Government (HMG) within the Prevention strand of the Spending Review proposals. Intended to test and develop approaches to data sharing that can be replicated across the UK and provide systems leadership through the Combined Authority Data Protection Officers and Information Rights forum (CADPAIR) and the Mayoral Data Council.

3.2.2 At the request of HMG a more informal collaboration was mobilised consistent with departmental capacity and commitment. Positive progress has been made with the establishment of a Joint Data Collaborative (JDC) to enable information sharing with DWP to initially support delivery of the Inactivity Trailblazer.

3.2.3 Work is now underway to consider how the JDC will evolve and iterate beyond the initial Economic Inactivity use case and build on the collaboration with government departments to increase local access to national data sets.

3.2.4 The collaboration with HMG has exposed the need for greater collaboration within the GM system and a dedicated forum to achieve this.

3.3 The Role of a Data Unit

3.3.1 Greater Manchester has a diversity of data assets, capabilities and system collaborations that are primarily focused on improving data access, governance and management and its capability and use (application). There is no single dedicated mechanism to coordinate, develop and lead these endeavours across the whole system.

3.3.2 GM has a unique opportunity to bring public sector partners together through a GM Data Unit to:

- Provide system and strategic data leadership

- Integrate processes and systems for requesting and responding to data sharing requests

- Ensure shared data translates into actionable Business Intelligence that delivers key outcomes.

- Drive capacity building and upskilling across the system at all levels

- Map the system assets and capabilities identifying opportunities to place our unique assets such as the GM Integrated Care Record at the forefront of the Prevention Demonstrator

- Take oversight of programme level activity to make strategic joins

- Better overall data governance and management, including adopting and building upon data standards that improve data quality.

- Ensure a data platform to both enable safe, secure and lawful data sharing and inform evaluation

- Build upon GM data sharing activities, including the Knowledge Transfer Partnership on developing an Information Sharing Framework.

- Set a new national standard for citizen and data controller engagement, transparency and ethical use of data that ensures trust, privacy, security and builds confidence in how data is being used.

- Interface with HMG through the JDU, Mayoral Data Council and Integrated Settlement to align data access to devolution

3.3.4 A GM Data Unit would unlock the full value of Greater Manchester data assets to deliver the ambitions of the Greater Manchester Strategy by:

- Maximising the value of our unique data assets in particular the GM Integrated Health and Care record

- Creating a trusted, system-wide capability that connects data, strengthens safeguards and empowers people

- Working with Government, industry and academia to embed best practice, enable responsible innovation, and expand new approaches to the ethical use of data

- Sharing best practice, tackling shared data challenges, and integrating data assets across partners

- Accelerating how data is used for the benefit of residents and drive economic growth

3.3.5 Longer term a unit would need to identify the core components of a "new city-regional data ecosystem / model" that can join up and analyse data to create multi-organisational actionable data insights for improved decision making and service deliver.

3.3.6 An initial partnership is proposed at Appendix 1.

3.4 Establishing a GM Data Unit

3.4.1 Endorsement and support from the wider GM system will be critical the success of a GM Data Unit and comprehensive stakeholder engagement will be essential to co-design a proposition with the system, respecting existing approaches and identifying where and how data collaboration can add greatest value to GMS priorities.

3.4.2 Work is already underway to socialise and validate the concept with partners through bi-lateral conversations.

3.4.3 Subject to endorsement of the recommendations set out in this report it is proposed that system leaders be convened through a roundtable to create a common understanding of the purpose of a GM Data Unit and secure endorsement to proceed.

3.4.3 A series of Co-design workshops to develop and define the model, map assets and data maturity, working through existing forums including the JDC, will be undertaken.

3.4.4 Key partners will be convened initially as a virtual Data Unit to evolve the proposition and identify dedicated leadership from the existing organisational capacity.

3.4.5 Consideration will be given to the capacity of the system to facilitate this co-design process and the value of securing third party support.

3.4.6 The indicative timeframe for mobilisation of the GM Data Unit is Autumn 2026. Immediate next steps are set out in Section 5

4. AI.GM

4.1 AI System Leadership

4.1.1 AI.GM is intended to be a GM wide forum to bring strategic coherence beyond the public sector and a mechanism through which to collectively identify and pursue opportunities as a city region both with industry, academia, HMG and other national bodies. Harnessing the thriving AI and innovation ecosystem, to deliver benefits to public services, drive growth and shape future innovation strategy and investments.

4.1.2   A number of initiatives are already underway under the banner of AI.GM, see section 4.2, which will benefit from system leadership to bring existing, related and future initiatives together.

4.1.3 GMCA recognise that such leadership exists within the ecosystem and academic partners can play in this space. The CA has a responsibility to use its convening power to mobilise this leadership on behalf of and in support of the whole system.

4.1.4 GMCA has issued a request for quotes to the ecosystem for a strategic partner to provide AI ecosystem leadership on an interim basis, taking oversight of projects under the banner of AI.GM and developing a sustainable model for longer term engagement and coordination.

4.1.5 Working through the AI ecosystem to understand the breadth of the significant assets, specialisms, research and innovation capabilities that exist across GM and ensure they are actively mobilised through AI.GM to build the strongest possible proposition for the city region.

4.2 Progress Update and future priorities

4.2.1 As set out in the report of May 2025 initial delivery priorities included hosting an international AI Summit to position GM as a global leader in the responsible adoption of AI for public good. The event will offer a broad agenda covering topics from the use of AI to create resilient cities and respond to evolving cyber threat, to creating more responsive services, building trust and making data more useable.

4.2.2. GMCA have appointed Global Governance Forum as a delivery partner and are working with them to deliver 2-day event in June 2026. A Steering Group to develop the agenda will bring together GM and national stakeholders.

4.2.3 In parallel we are continuing to scope and explore resourcing options for a GM AI Challenge prize styled on the highly successful 'Civtech' model, to support AI sector development and advance AI-enabled public services.

4.2.4 We have agreed with Perspective Economics to deliver AI Sector research, to provide insights that will guide strategic decision making on initiatives and investment designed to drive inclusive innovation and growth in the GM AI sector.

4.2.5 The submission to DSIT to secure AI Growth Zone status for GM was not successful as the city region does not have a single site of the scale to site a Data Centre that met the DSIT specifications for AI Growth Zone designation.

4.2.6 Ensuring the infrastructure and access to sovereign compute remains critical to realising the AI Demonstrator ambition and this ambition is now being taken forward through the development of a Data Centre Strategy to curate and secure responsible data centre investment that will be additive to the GM AI ecosystem and wider economy.

4.2.7 University of Manchester and MMU have iterated their proposition for investment to support AI growth. The Grow AI proposition was submitted to UKRI through the Local Innovation Partnership Fund.

4.2.8 GMCA additionally submitted a response to the DSIT AI Growth Lab call for evidence, to explore regulatory barriers to AI adoption. TfGM are in dialogue with DSIT about this opportunity.

4.2.9 GMCA is supporting University of Manchester to deliver a GM Digital Trust, Identity, Privacy, Safety, and Security (TIPPS) project, to set ethical standards for digital public services. Whilst MMU through the Centre for Digital Innovation (CDI) are developing an AI Charter with SMEs. Co-ordinating these research strengths with

those of the University of Salford will cement GM's a leading responsible and ethical AI ecosystem.

4.3.0 Establishing a coherent inclusive system wide AI forum for the GM AI ecosystem to connect partners beyond the public sector; engage with industry; and build a more proactive relationship to government, particularly DSIT, remains a priority to ensure GM is able to both respond to and influence national policy. This will be the priority action for the AI.GM lead in Q1 25/26.

5. Next Steps

5.1 GM Data Unit

5.1.1 Subject to endorsement it is proposed that the proposition for a GM Data Unit will be further socialised with partners and a pan GM roundtable convened to develop the concept. (April 2026)

5.1.2 Identify resources, drawing on the capacity of the system, to mobilise a virtual unit to undertake initial data asset mapping, maturity assessments and design workshops for a GM Data Unit. (June 2026)

5.1.3 To bring forward a fuller proposition and delivery model for consideration.

5.2 AI.GM

5.2.1 To appoint an interim AI.GM Strategic Lead. (March 2026)

5.5.2 Convene the wider AI ecosystem initially through an AI Advisory Council bringing together AI leaders

5.2.3 Delivery of the Global AI Cities 2026 summit in June 2026

5.2.4 Agree scope and resourcing approach for a GM AI Challenge Prize

5.2.5 Deliver AI sector analysis with initial findings ready to share at Global AI cities 2026

6. Recommendations

6.1 Note the progress and ongoing development of AI.GM

6.2 Endorse the principle of a GM Data Unit to complement the work of the Joint Data Collaborative and support wider system engagement

6.3 Receive a future detailed proposition and delivery model for a GM Data Unit

7. Appendix: Proposed Data Unit Partnership

Initial Partnership

- GMCA/ GMRFS
- GM Local Authorities
- TfGM
- NHS GM
- Health Innovation Manchester

GM Partnership Collaborators

- GM Universities
- Innovate GM

National Collaborators

- DSIT: CDDO
- HMG via the Joint Data Collaborative
- Innovate UK

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