



Mayor,

Andy Burnham with Elizabeth Vega: Demonstrating Responsible AI for Public Good



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Elizabeth Vega

Andy Burnham

16th March 2026 - Full Transcript.

[0:10] Hello and welcome to the digital leaders

[0:13] public sector AI week 2026. This week is

[0:16] about moving from AI ambition to real

[0:19] world impact and about how digital data

[0:21] and AI can genuinely improve people's

[0:23] lives and public services. As chair of

[0:26] the digital leaders and also as founder

[0:28] of informed solutions, a mid-tier

[0:30] digital transformation and AI business

[0:32] headquartered in Greater Manchester for

[0:34] over 30 years. It's my absolute pleasure
[0:36] to interview the mayor of Greater
[0:38] Manchester, Andy Bernham. Through my
[0:40] role with digital leaders, we see
[0:41] extraordinary innovation across the UK.
[0:44] But Greater Manchester stands out for
[0:46] its coherence and scale of both ambition
[0:48] and approach. As one of the country's
[0:51] most established devolved city regions,
[0:53] it has taken a distinctive approach to
[0:55] using digital data and AI very
[0:57] intentionally as a tool to strengthen
[0:59] public services, build resilient
[1:01] communities, and support inclusive
[1:03] growth and economic development. That
[1:06] includes embedding digital inclusion
[1:08] within Manchester's live Well reform
[1:10] agenda, investing in shared
[1:12] infrastructure, enabling joined up data
[1:14] and public services, and accelerating
[1:16] the responsible adoption of AI across
[1:19] all 10 bers of Greater Manchester. I'm
[1:21] very keen to explore how the mayor sees
[1:23] digital and AI, helping turn that vision
[1:26] into a reality. With that, I'd like to

[1:29] thank the mayor of Greater Manchester,
[1:30] Andy Bernham, for being willing to share
[1:32] his experiences and insights with us and
[1:34] the digital leaders network of the UK.

[1:41] Mayor, a very, very warm welcome to you
[1:43] and thank you so much for agreeing to
[1:45] open the digital leaders AI in the
[1:47] public sector week.

[1:48] >> I'm honoured to do that. Thank you very
[1:50] much.

>> Greater Manchester is the most
[1:53] successful economy in the UK, the
[1:55] fastest growing, the most thriving, and
[1:57] also the fastest growing tech hub in
[1:59] Europe. A large part of that is down to
[2:02] purpose-led leadership and actually
[2:04] having a vision, a vision for what we
[2:06] want for our community and for public
[2:08] services. So I'd really like to get your
[2:11] insights on in particular if we can
[2:14] start with the Greater Manchester 2025

[2:16] strategy that will cover the blueprint

[2:18] for the next decade. What role do you

[2:20] see digital and AI playing in the

[2:22] enablement and the realization of that

[2:24] strategy and vision for Greater

[2:25] Manchester?

[2:27] >> I see digital tech AI and all of its

[2:30] forms playing a foundational role

[2:33] >> in the ongoing success of Greater

[2:35] Manchester underpinning everything. When

[2:37] I came in as mayor in 2017, I set the

[2:40] ambition of making Greater Manchester

[2:42] the UK's leading digital city region. I

[2:45] believe we've there or thereabouts

[2:47] achieve that. It's partly about having a

[2:51] tech sector that is big by headcount and

[2:55] vibrant and we've got that in the city

[2:57] center. But I was always clear it was

[2:59] much more than that. And it's about all

[3:02] of our residents, all citizens online,

[3:04] everybody connected to the digital

[3:06] economy. And sometimes that second bit

[3:08] gets missed off

[3:09] >> uh in cities. Kind of risks of a new

[3:12] inequality opening up which is those who
[3:14] can afford to be online and those those
[3:16] who can't. I think we have to take
[3:18] digital exclusion really seriously. Uh
[3:21] and we put a lot of focus into that. Um
[3:24] because if people are are online these
[3:26] days, they're in the conversation. They
[3:28] can see the opportunity. They can be
[3:30] part of the growing digital economy. So
[3:32] we've had initiatives around digital
[3:34] inclusion. We've worked with Raspberry
[3:36] Pi Foundation to bring forward a new
[3:39] >> qualification uh that young people can
[3:41] take at school alongside their

[3:43] >> excellent

[3:44] >> GCSEs. Uh because we recognize, you
[3:46] know, the policy nationally is not
[3:48] supporting digital inclusion as much as
[3:50] it should do. Hence we've brought
[3:52] through our own approach.
[3:53] >> Yeah. And the skills part of it very
[3:55] definitely the skills part of it.
[3:57] >> The skills part of it is huge. You we

[3:58] have jobs uh in digital and tech in this

[4:02] city that we simply wouldn't have been

[4:04] able to imagine a decade ago. Jobs in

[4:08] cyber.

[4:09] >> Uh GCHQ have made a commitment to

[4:11] Greater Manchester around innovation

[4:14] which has given incredible opportunity

[4:17] to our young people. But currently the

[4:19] education system in my view isn't

[4:22] putting them on a path to those

[4:24] opportunities in the way that it should.

[4:26] So we've been rethinking education here,

[4:29] crucially digital skills and literacy as

[4:32] part of education to give all young

[4:34] people a line of sight to those jobs and

[4:37] a path to those jobs. It's still work in

[4:39] progress.

[4:40] >> but we think it does set us apart from

[4:42] what's been going on nationally. Well,

[4:44] it's important to have a strategic

[4:45] vision and digital and AI intersect with

[4:47] pretty much every of the key sectors

[4:49] that the Greater Manchester has.

[4:50] Creative, manufacturing, advanced

[4:52] materials, everything.

[4:53] >> You know, AI is a strength here.

[4:56] >> We have the largest headcount in the

[4:58] AI sector by um you know, by some

[5:00] distance,

[5:01] >> by some margin. Yeah.

[5:02] >> However, the mistake people might make

[5:06] is to consider AI as a sector.

[5:08] >> Yes,

[5:09] >> it is. But as you were saying, it's a

[5:12] foundational technology that will

[5:14] underpin all of the other innovative

[5:16] industries that we've got. Life sciences

[5:19] and health obviously

[5:21] >> huge there, but also um the green

[5:25] economy, advanced materials and

[5:27] manufacturing, which are all part of our

[5:29] >> of our sectoral strengths, creative

[5:31] media. So we see AI as foundational uh

[5:35] to the modern Greater Manchester economy

[5:37] and it's really important to to stress

[5:39] that

[5:40] >> you've done something very interesting.

[5:41] You've actually positioned Greater

[5:42] Manchester as the UK's AI demonstrator

[5:45] and in the conversations that we're

[5:47] having with digital leaders and other

[5:48] public sector uh organizations and

[5:50] leaders. There's a great deal of

[5:52] ambition around AI but a lot less

[5:54] clarity about what the AI adoption is

[5:56] particularly around inclusion and

[5:58] responsible adoption of AI. How do you

[6:01] see the city region actually

[6:02] demonstrating what responsible

[6:04] purpose-driven outcomes focused AI looks

[6:07] like?

[6:08] >> Well, we've had um the deepest

[6:11] devolution deal here for some time. So,

[6:14] as a result of that, we've got a very

[6:17] integrated approach uh to public

[6:20] services and a very networked approach

[6:23] between public sector, private sector,

[6:25] voluntary sector, academia. That's the

[6:28] Greater Manchester magic if you like the

[6:30] way we work in very close

[6:32] >> the culture and the ethos isn't it?

[6:34] >> Yeah, I would say I would honestly this

[6:36] sounds like a pol' - politicians boast.

[6:37] Uh but I would say we are the most networked

[6:40] city in the world and when I say networked

[6:42] there's physical uh digital networks,

[6:45] transport networks, but I'm talking

[6:46] about the partnership between people and

[6:48] sectors relationship.

[6:49] >> It's really close. the incoming uh vice

[6:51] chancellor of our university, University

[6:53] of Manchester, Duncan Iverson, said he

[6:55] just couldn't believe the closeness of

[6:57] the partnership when he came here from

[6:59] Sydney. He said it's really different

[7:01] and we're proud of that. What we are

[7:03] saying to the government is because of

[7:05] the way we have a different approach to

[7:08] public services, highly integrated,

[7:11] we could be the UK's prevention

[7:13] demonstrator.

>> Mhm.

[7:15] >> So we could show how public services can

[7:17] work differently to work in a more

[7:20] preventative way and support residents

[7:23] differently. So they accepted that

[7:26] argument in the um 10-year health plan

[7:28] that the government put forward

[7:29] >> and as part of that now we want to bring

[7:32] forward an AI demonstrator.

[7:35] So bring together public data sets from

[7:39] local, regional, national level and

[7:42] start to use AI to identify people

[7:46] within the city region who need a

[7:47] different approach,

[7:48] >> more proactive

[7:50] >> Yeah. And at a time before it

[7:51] becomes a crisis, how do you use clever

[7:54] use of of AI to identify people who need

[7:57] earlier support?

>> Yeah.

[7:58] >> Uh and consequently much more effective,

[8:02] efficient use of public services. um

[8:05] that will mean much better outcomes for

[8:06] them. So that's what the AI demonstrator

[8:09] is is really focused on a sort of data

[8:12] unit that will hopefully transform the

[8:15] way public services think and work.

[8:18] >> You've talked a lot about the

[8:20] collaboration and the fact that there's

[8:21] just such a network of relationships in

[8:23] our city region. One of the consistent

[8:26] challenges with other public sector

[8:27] leaders is how they actually coordinate

[8:30] AI responsibly across organizational

[8:32] boundaries. you've established an AI and

[8:36] uh data innovation office to enable

[8:38] that. How do you see the ADIO actually

[8:41] helping that AI adoption and helping

[8:43] Greater Manchester not just digitally

[8:45] transform but become an AI powered city

[8:48] where there is collaboration, there is

[8:50] trust which is a very big currency in

[8:52] the adoption of AI and also focusing on
[8:55] delivering real outcomes for people and
[8:57] public services rather than perhaps
[8:59] purely a technologist point of view.

[9:01] >>So, I'm going to answer that, Elizabeth, by
[9:03] saying this is a city region with a
[9:06] strong sense of right and wrong. You
[9:08] know, what what is uh a good thing to do
[9:10] to help people and make broad progress
[9:13] in society and what shouldn't we, you
[9:15] know, what should we be clear about
[9:16] that's not acceptable? And I think if I
[9:19] look back, I was in government when the
[9:22] social media revolution was was really
[9:24] getting going. And I don't think we kind
[9:26] of took that approach at that time. and
[9:29] we almost just let it kind of sweep over
[9:30] us
[9:31] >> and we lost sense of what was right and
[9:33] wrong and things that were wrong have
[9:35] kind of crept in way too much into
[9:37] everyday life in terms of images that
[9:41] shouldn't be seen certainly by children

[9:43] >> Online safety yeah

>> Hate, descrimination.

[9:44] >> so I look at the kind of AI um

[9:49] revolution and I think we got to kind of

[9:51] take that sense of what's right and

[9:52] what's wrong what what do people think

[9:54] is is is good and should be encouraged

[9:56] and what actually we we we don't want to

[9:59] see and set those guard rails down and

[10:01] do it at a city region level because I

[10:02] think

[10:03] >> governments are struggling to do this

[10:05] aren't they at a at a national level. I

[10:07] think here I've got a clear sense myself

[10:09] of what people will accept and what they

[10:11] won't.

[10:11] >> And what we're going to say is that

[10:13] let's let's go towards this AI

[10:16] revolution with those guard rails in um

[10:19] and try and extract the full benefit of

[10:21] AI in terms of the health benefit it

[10:24] could give people while then being quite

[10:27] conscious of where the downside risks

[10:29] are and where the trust may be eroded

[10:31] and use Greater Manchester in some ways

[10:33] as a test bed.

>> Yeah,

[10:35] >> you know, we're in a city region

[10:37] >> and we have 10 boroughs as well.

[10:39] >> So that is that is

[10:40] >> high degree of partnership between those

[10:41] borers and then the different public

[10:43] services, policing, NHS,

[10:46] >> huge uh uh relationship with the private

[10:48] sector here. We work very closely

[10:50] community and voluntary sector. It's

[10:52] what I mean by a very networked city region. It's

[10:55] almost you we we offer a kind of secure

[10:59] data sort of world if you like for

[11:02] outside entities to come in work with us

[11:05] >> and test technologies but with a view to

[11:08] right and wrong and where there'll be

[11:10] human benefits but also human harms and

[11:13] how we augment the benefits mitigate the

[11:16] harms you know I think AI needs that

[11:18] type of approach and Greater Manchester
[11:20] is probably better placed
[11:22] >> than anywhere I would say not just in
[11:24] the UK in the world, you know, because
[11:26] of the nature of the city region that we
[11:28] that we are. The danger with AI would be
[11:30] >> in a very fragmented way, it just again
[11:33] like social media sort of sweeps sweeps
[11:35] through
[11:36] >> and causes, you know, quite a lot of
[11:38] harm in its wake. I think we've got
[11:40] to be on the front foot with AI, not on
[11:42] the back foot as we were uh with the
[11:45] social media revolution.

[11:46] >> Yeah. It's balance innovation and its
[11:48] ability to contribute to a better
[11:50] society with looking ahead and
[11:52] considering what that impact whether
[11:53] that could be harmful.

[11:54] >> So innovation for the public good, for
[11:56] the common good, isn't it? Um and not I
[11:59] think allowing
[12:01] >> I don't know. I think we've seen the

[12:02] emergence of business models in social
[12:04] media that are based on public harm
[12:07] and and that we've got to be honest
[12:09] about that. It's, you know, now we're
[12:11] having a debate about banning social
[12:13] media for under 16s and, you know, in
[12:15] some ways it's stable door when the
[12:17] horse is long gone, isn't it? To some
[12:19] degree.

>> Yeah.

[12:20] >> Uh, and I just don't think we should get
[12:21] ourselves in into that position. You
[12:23] know, harness the benefits, which are
[12:26] going to be vast. But if you don't deal
[12:28] with it in that way, the negatives will
[12:31] undermine trust in in the use of AI for
[12:33] the benefits. And I think that's the got
[12:35] to be really clear-eyed about

[12:37] >> self-defeating.

[12:38] >> Well, it could be. You've got to be
[12:39] really clear-eyed about that at this at

[12:41] this moment in time and and perhaps also

[12:44] in a place like Greater Manchester sense

[12:45] where the public kind of consent is is

[12:49] in place for some of the test cases it

>> It's that social contract isn't it?

[12:53] >> yeah I think with health I think it's

[12:55] self-evident I think to most people that

[12:57] if you know AI is to sort of be used in

[13:01] diagnostics

[13:03] um and you know to do the sort of

[13:05] nth-degree examination

[13:07] as a safety with regard to sort of the

[13:10] you know human eye examination of of

[13:12] diagnostic scans etc. Clearly it's going

[13:15] to pick pick things up and it's going to

[13:18] save lives and there's no question about

[13:19] it. So I it so then how do you take that

[13:22] principle further in the health care

[13:24] world? I think there would be consent uh

[13:26] for that but be upfront with people

[13:28] about what's being done what's what data

[13:30] is being used why is it being used. I do

[13:33] feel we need to go out the AI revolution

[13:35] in that way. Um and that's what Greater
[13:38] Manchester can offer and that's why
[13:40] we've put ourselves forward as an AI
[13:42] demonstrator.

[13:42] >> Well, we're delighted to be and we're
[13:44] obviously part of the community here.
[13:45] That is a very nice segue into the trust
[13:48] tests that we need to satisfy. So what
[13:50] do you see as the most meaningful in a
[13:52] concrete way use of AI to strengthen
[13:55] those services and community resilience
[13:56] as well? Living well but aging better as
[13:58] well in the way that you've said you
[14:00] know in a preventative way in a way that
[14:02] also empowers people to receive the best
[14:05] possible treatments in a timely fashion.
[14:07] and how do you how can you ensure that
[14:09] those benefits are actually realized
[14:10] across all 10 boroughs because that
[14:12] inclusivity picture is a very big part
[14:14] of your vision as well.

>> So I don't

[14:16] believe that we are in any way using

[14:19] public data to maximum public benefit

[14:22] because of the construct of government

[14:24] and it's not just the case in the UK

[14:26] it's probably true in many other

[14:27] countries as well you know we have

[14:29] separate departments transport work and

[14:32] pensions health and they all have data

[14:36] on elements of what's going on in

[14:38] somebody's life but not the totality of

[14:40] what's going on. The opportunity is if

[14:44] you

[14:46] merge that data and you allow to be

[14:49] developed that's about the whole person

[14:51] >> or indeed the whole place when you're

[14:53] looking at sort of issues that you're

[14:54] dealing with in a particular locality. I

[14:56] just think it will it will mean

[14:58] different interventions

[15:00] >> and earlier interventions and actually

[15:02] gets the heart perhaps of why somebody's

[15:05] ill and repeatedly going to their GP.

[15:07] often it won't be the medical problem is

[15:10] the symptom of something much deeper

[15:11] that's wrong that's

[15:13] >> uh you know it might be a housing

[15:14] problem a debt problem a bereavement
[15:16] issue or trauma related issue I think
[15:20] public services are set up to deal with
[15:22] the symptoms rather than the causes and
[15:24] I think the time has come to use
[15:28] technology in a careful way to promote a
[15:31] very different way of supporting people
[15:34] in the 21st century with much more uh
[15:37] effective whole person uh oriented
[15:40] public services. So that's the way I see
[15:43] it. Technology is a route to making
[15:45] public services sustainable but also uh
[15:48] giving people much better lives. You
[15:50] know, we allow too many people to fall
[15:51] into crisis when actually if we were to
[15:54] use technology more cleverly that
[15:56] needn't be the case.

[15:58] >> To conclude, if I may our conversation
[16:00] because I know your time is at a
[16:01] premium, it's Greater Manchester is a
[16:04] role model. You've been very bold.
[16:06] You've been very progressive in your
[16:07] thinking. Part of the experiences and
[16:09] the insights that you've gathered in

[16:10] both developing your tenure blueprint
[16:12] and strategy, but also in some of the
[16:15] successes that have actually helped
[16:16] Manchester become the very vibrant and
[16:18] economically inclusive city region that
[16:20] it is, what would be some of the
[16:22] pointers that you would give other
[16:23] public sector leaders to help them
[16:25] achieve the same sort of outcomes?

[16:27] >> I think the ingredients of our success
[16:29] and that success is increasingly evident
[16:32] uh to people. It does. Well, it starts
[16:34] with devolution.

[16:35] >> Mhm.

[16:36] >> I think when people have more power in
[16:40] their hands at a level that's closer to
[16:42] the street, if you like, closer to
[16:44] people and places and communities. I
[16:47] just think that creates the conditions
[16:49] for innovation and for bottom-up
[16:52] approaches and changes. And you know, we
[16:55] were the pioneers of the model of

[16:56] English devolution that we have.

[16:58] >> Yeah.

>> And I think it's, you know, it's

[17:00] it starts with that, you know, more

[17:03] agency for people at a local and

[17:05] regional level to to change the world

[17:07] that we're in. But then from that, it's

[17:10] not about letting devolution cause

[17:12] fragmentation and one thing going off in

[17:15] this direction. It's like having a

[17:17] really clear ambition for what you're

[17:20] trying to do and then get all people

[17:23] sort of lining up together, facing in

[17:26] the same direction and then pulling in

[17:28] the same direction. That's the that that

[17:30] is the thing. If you could kind of put

[17:32] your finger on one thing, it's the sense

[17:35] of of that whole place approach which we

[17:37] have built here. you know, when you have

[17:39] a a place that all sort of pulls

[17:42] together in the same direction, the

[17:43] power of that is is awesome. And that's

[17:47] what Greater Manchester has built way before

[17:48] me. You know, I I've kind of tried to
[17:50] continue that tradition, but that's the
[17:53] that's the kind of core the core of it
[17:56] and be long-term, you know, politics at
[17:58] a national level.

[17:59] >> I love that it's horizons. It's not

[18:01] >> Yeah, we don't, you know, I set some
[18:03] ambitions as mayor in 2017. You know,
[18:05] that point about being the UK's leading
[18:06] digital city region. still that's we've
[18:09] not changed you know we've we've stuck
[18:11] that path and that course net zero you
[18:14] know we're not a place that is going
[18:16] cold on on that idea even though you
[18:18] know the politics of it has changed
[18:20] elsewhere in the world well not here we
[18:22] still believe it's a route to better
[18:25] lives for our residents more prosperity
[18:27] in the city region a better world and so
[18:30] we're we're on that path and we won't be
[18:31] deflected uh from from that. What I've
[18:34] tried to do here is is in many ways make
[18:37] Greater Manchester everything that the

[18:39] uh Westminster system isn't. So
[18:42] long-term high ambitions. They never had
[18:45] an ambition for us. We've had to set
[18:46] those ambitions ourselves. And then you
[18:49] know with that kind of high ambition,
[18:52] the maximum degree of partnership
[18:55] towards achieving it on a long-term
[18:57] basis and stick at it and be more place
[19:00] first rather than party first when it
[19:01] comes to your approach. You don't just
[19:03] go straight to the point scoring and the
[19:05] the division that results. uh from that

[19:07] >> sadly. Yeah.

[19:08] >> Work across divides, pull people uh
[19:11] together, think about solutions. That's
[19:14] that's what we try and do. I like to
[19:17] think that it's um that it's working.
[19:19] >> Um but I you know I also uh feel that
[19:22] there's still much further to go.

[19:24] >> Mayor, it has been an honour to have your
[19:26] insights and to also have followed the
[19:28] journey with you over the last few

[19:29] years.

[19:30] >> Thank you for your interest and support

[19:31] for what we've done.

>> my absolute

[19:33] pleasure and also for your generosity in

[19:35] sharing your insights, your learnings

[19:37] and the successes and for your openness

[19:39] to to not just within the 10 burrows but

[19:42] actually I know that you have hosted

[19:44] visits from other u from other

[19:45] authorities and and actually from

[19:47] Scotland as well

[19:48] >> and we learn from them and I don't want

[19:50] this to sound Elizabeth as though we

[19:51] feel we've got you know all the answers

[19:54] and we haven't you know we we we um

[19:57] welcome uh partnerships with other

[19:59] places we've just signed an agreement

[20:01] with the um Cambridge and Peterbrra

[20:03] combined authority link in Cambridge

[20:05] University, Manchester University

[20:06] because we know there's amazing work

[20:08] going on uh in other places as well. But
[20:11] we also think we can be a sort of a
[20:13] place where the great research that's
[20:14] being done elsewhere can actually be
[20:16] translated in a system like Greater
[20:18] Manchester more easily. So yeah, we've
[20:21] got so much further to go. you know,
[20:23] we're we're not where fully where we
[20:24] want to be, but the exciting thing is
[20:27] we're beginning to see the
[20:28] reindustrialization of the birthplace of
[20:31] the original industrial revolution. And
[20:34] honestly, I can't tell you how uh how
[20:36] brilliant that feels.

[20:37] >> That's how home grown becomes world
[20:38] class.

[20:39] >> Abs. Absolutely.

[20:40] >> Thank you so much, Mayor.

>> You're welcome.

[20:41] It's been a pleasure. Thank you.