

## English Devolution White Paper - Digest

### Key messages

“Local government plays an essential role in convening local partners around neighbourhoods to ensure that community voices are represented and people have influence over their place and their valued community assets. We want to work with the sector to ensure that the existing structures and mechanisms for community partnership enable them to fulfil this role. **We will also work with the town and parish council sector to improve engagement between them and Local Authorities.**” (p94)

“We know people value the role of governance at the community scale and that can be a concern when local government is reorganised. We will therefore want to see stronger community arrangements when reorganisation happens in the way councils engage at a neighbourhood or area level. We will **also rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal Local Authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice.**” (p 100)

### Points to Note

“Ending this cycle means a permanent shift of power away from Whitehall and into the hands of those who know their communities best.” (p8)

“We must end the top-down micromanaging of individual decisions and approaches by local leaders and replace it with a principle of constitutional autonomy and partnership.” (p10)

The government will put a framework into legislation setting out the powers that go with each type of authority. (p13)

***If strategic funding is only at the level of strategic authorities, how will the most local communities access regeneration, growth and transport improvements at the ultra-local level?***

***Spatial Development Strategy – supersedes Local Plan and sits under NPPF – what room for neighbourhoods?***

A ‘Mayoral Levy’ (in addition to CIL?) will be set by SAs (p15)

“expand Strategic Authorities’ role in leading Local Nature Recovery Strategies” (p15)

“Over the long term, the government is announcing an ambition to align public service boundaries, including job centres, police, probation, fire, health services and Strategic and Local Authorities.” (p16)

There is a different way: empowered local leaders, who know their area better than any Westminster politician, whose sole job is to deliver for their residents. By taking back control, people can begin to regain their faith in politics as a force for good. (p21)

“In other developed countries that introduced greater devolution, people were more satisfied with public services” (p22) – citing research that is only significant for populations below 1.8 million and shows that small units are more beneficial than larger ones

For **hyper-local** issues, communities should be empowered to make change happen – such as taking over ownership of treasured community assets, and working with civic society organisations to drive community improvements. (p26)

### **Proposed list of areas of competence**

We would like to engage with views from Mayors and the whole of the local government sector on the areas of competence. The following list should be considered as areas where Strategic Authorities should have a mandate to act strategically to drive growth as well as support the shaping of public services, where strategic level coordination adds value. We are interested in where this list could be expanded now or in the future:

1. Transport and local infrastructure
2. Skills and employment support
3. Housing and strategic planning
4. Economic development and regeneration
5. Environment and climate change.
6. Health, wellbeing and public service reform
7. Public safety

(p29)

### ***End of Mayor and Cabinet unitary council model of governance – Leader and Cabinet only***

### ***May make counties the taxi licensing authority rather than districts***

As part of this mission, Great British Energy will be tasked to work with local government through the **Local Power Plan** to support the roll out of small-medium renewable energy projects at the local level. This is expected to provide support for Strategic and Local Authorities (as well as community energy groups) to deploy up to 8G W of additional power from small-medium sized generation projects by 2030, and to help Strategic and Local Authorities to build their own pipelines of successful projects. (p74)

### ***Table on p92 – stops short of local councils***

### **Section 4.1 – Communities (p93-95)**

As part of this mission, Great British Energy will be tasked to work with local government through the Local Power Plan to support the roll out of small-medium renewable energy projects at the local level. This is expected to provide support for Strategic and Local Authorities (as well as community energy groups) to deploy up to 8G W of additional power from small-medium sized generation projects by 2030, and to help Strategic and Local Authorities to build their own pipelines of successful projects. (p96)

Decisions with purely local implications should, by default, be taken locally, within a clear, streamlined national framework setting out the roles and responsibilities of different tiers of government, **which makes clear that local leaders' decision making over local issues is paramount.** (p98)

***The end of funding pots and grants will be challenging for councils not in receipt of integrated settlements. (p99)***

***What about parish councils' ability to make byelaws and levy FPNs (p99)***

***If new unitaries are ~500,000 and SAs are >1.5M – it implies 3UAs per SA!***

In addition, new unitary councils can enable new and innovative community level and partnership working. (p102)

#### **4.2.4 Audit, Insight and Standards – (p103-105)**

***Consult on CoC and Standards changes – all look positive, but overlook the LGA Model code which is more up to date and widely implemented.***

**“we will establish a local government workforce development group – this will be run in partnership with the sector and will identify practical solutions to help resolve and improve workforce issues and promote the sector as a great place to work” (p104)**

#### **5.1.2 Improving accountability and scrutiny of local public spending (p107)**

***Proposals may localise some audit responsibilities.***

## Summary

The document contains several sections related to local communities:

### 1. Partnership working with the most deprived communities:

- The government will reform the Long Term Plan for Towns into a new regeneration programme, working in partnership with 75 towns across the UK to build capacity and sustain improvements for local residents. (p93)

### 2. Protecting cherished community assets and high streets:

- The government will replace the community 'Right to Bid' with a strengthened 'Right to Buy' Assets of Community Value, supporting community ownership through the Community Ownership Fund. (p94)
- New High Street Rental Auction regulations will provide **local communities** and businesses with a right to rent long-vacant premises, supporting vibrant high streets. (p94)

### 3. Enhancing Local Authorities' powers in their areas:

- Local Authorities will have strengthened abilities to manage vacant residential premises and introduce large selective licensing schemes without requiring the Secretary of State's approval. (p94)
- The government will explore giving Local Authorities new discretionary tools to manage the proliferation of certain types of premises that can exacerbate health and anti-social behaviour challenges. (p94)

### 4. Community engagement and partnership:

- The government will work with the town and parish council sector to improve engagement between them and Local Authorities, ensuring community voices are represented and people have influence over their place and valued community assets. (p95)

These initiatives aim to empower local communities, protect cherished assets, and enhance the role of Local Authorities in managing and improving their areas. (p7)

The approach to creating Strategic Authorities and their definition will involve the following steps:

### Creation of Strategic Authorities:

#### 1. Legislation:

- The government will legislate to introduce the concept of a Strategic Authority.

#### 2. Levels of Strategic Authorities:

- **Foundation Strategic Authorities:** These include non-mayoral Combined Authorities, Combined County Authorities, and any Local Authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.
  - **Mayoral Strategic Authorities:** These include the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities, and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities. Those meeting specified eligibility criteria may be designated as Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities, unlocking further devolution, most notably an Integrated Settlement.
3. **Geographical Coverage:**
- The government aims for full devolution coverage across England, at least to the level of Foundation Strategic Authorities, with an ambition to move to a mayoral model.
4. **Ministerial Directive:**
- To ensure complete national coverage, the government will legislate for a ministerial directive to create Strategic Authorities in regions where local leaders have not been able to agree on accessing devolved powers.

#### **Definition and Competence of Strategic Authorities:**

1. **Areas of Competence:**
- Strategic Authorities will have a defined list of areas of competence set out in law, including:
    - Transport and local infrastructure
    - Skills and employment support
    - Housing and strategic planning
    - Economic development and regeneration
    - Environment and climate change
    - Health, wellbeing, and public service reform
    - Public safety
2. **Governance and Voting Arrangements:**
- In Mayoral Strategic Authorities, a majority vote including the Mayor will be required for most decisions. Specific functions will be exercisable only by the Mayor.
  - In Foundation Strategic Authorities, most decisions will require a majority, but key strategic decisions will require unanimity.

**3. Adding to the Devolution Framework:**

- The Devolution Framework will be regularly reviewed and can be expanded to include additional functions as Strategic Authorities grow in capacity and coverage.

This structured approach aims to ensure that Strategic Authorities are created effectively, with clear roles and responsibilities, enabling them to drive growth and deliver better outcomes for their regions.