

BRIEFING NOTE

MOTION: Local Government Re-organisation

Proposers- Cllrs Gina Dowding, Tim Hamilton-Cox, Cllr Joyce Pritchard, Sally Maddocks, Caroline Jackson, Peter Jackson, Joyce Pritchard, and Paul Stubbins.

Local Government Re-organisation

Lancaster City Council notes

1. The Government's White Paper published on 16 December sets out its intention to abolish county and district councils, including Lancaster City Council, and create unitary councils with populations of around half a million people.
2. The proposal drawn up by one of Lancashire's MPs which was supported by a number of Lancashire MPs, is to create 3 or 4 unitary councils in Lancashire. In this proposal Lancaster City Council area would be merged with the existing Blackpool unitary and Wyre district councils, (and possibly with Fylde district council). A conflicting proposal, from the Labour leader of Preston council, would merge Lancaster district and Ribble Valley within a 3-council unitary.
3. That with regard to the above different proposals circulated by Labour MPs and councillors from elsewhere in Lancashire, Lancaster City Council leadership has not been involved in discussions or asked for its views before publication.
4. That the UK already stands out in Europe as having a very high local authority population size.
5. Lancaster City Council previously supported the creation of a Bay Unitary Authority, backed by councillors from all 5 political groups on Lancaster City Council, which would have served a smaller population of 300,000 that better reflected community identity. This was rejected by Government in July 2021.
6. That previously in November 2023, the Government announced it had negotiated a Level 2 devolution deal with Lancashire County, Blackpool, and Blackburn with Darwen Councils. This deal is set to transfer new powers and funding to the Lancashire Combined County Authority (CCA), in a deal that includes £20 million of capital funding to invest in local priorities and the devolution of the Adult Education Budget.
7. That this Level 2 Devolution deal is currently being progressed through Parliament.

Lancaster City Council believes

1. That devolution of powers and resources from Whitehall to Lancashire is welcome in principle, but accountability to residents, working arrangements with existing councils and the protection and enhancement of existing local services and decision making all require consideration and agreement involving elected representatives in the county at all levels;

2. The new White Paper's insistence of another level of re-organising local councils will not give time for the agreed proposals for a CCA across Lancashire to bed in;
3. That whilst the Labour manifesto pledged to create Strategic Authorities, the plans to reorganise district and borough level councils into large unitaries was not an election pledge. There is little evidence that such reorganisation will deliver better services or enhance local decision making.
4. That reorganisation ensuing from the December 2024 White Paper will have significant short- and medium-term financial costs, not savings, contrary to what government claims; and that it will be highly disruptive for the staff who deliver services;
5. That local services and facilities are best provided by truly local councils sensitive to the needs of local residents. The proposals will create a massive democratic deficit, with power being centralised further away from residents and do not reflect the identity and interests of local communities and would bring less responsiveness and less accountability;
6. That attention which would otherwise be focused on solving problems affecting our local residents will be diverted into Local Government Reorganisation discussions.

Council, therefore, resolves

1. To oppose the current basis of local government reorganisation in Lancashire, and its insistence on creating unitary councils required to service huge populations of around 500,000 people.
2. To push for and plan for a 'referendum' or meaningful far-reaching consultation on the matter to ascertain the views of local people before any specific realignment of district councils takes place which affect Lancaster City Council's residents. The wording and details of any such referendum or consultation shall be agreed by this council at a later date.
3. To mandate the Leader of the Council and the executive to build on existing arrangements with Lancashire authorities where shared services deliver better value for money, and to develop a shared vision for the future.
4. To send a letter requesting that our two MPs work alongside the City Council to achieve the best possible outcome for local people with respect to the future structure of local governance.

OFFICER BRIEFING NOTE

BACKGROUND

Government's English Devolution White Paper was published on 16th Dec 2024.

[English Devolution White Paper - GOV.UK](#)

A factual summary of the main points of the white paper (produced by the Local Government Association) is included at **Appendix A**.

As can be seen the white paper covers a wide range of issues of which Local Government Reorganisation is a part.

Minister McMahon also wrote to Councils on the 16th Dec 2024. With regards to LGR he wrote-

My intention is to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025 from all councils in two-tier areas, and small neighbouring unitary councils. In this invitation, I will set out further detail on the criteria I will consider when taking decisions on the proposals that are submitted to Government. I intend to ask for interim plans by March 2025. As set out in the White Paper, new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more. However, there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including on devolution. Final decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. We will ask you to work with other councils in your area to develop unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area, rather than developing competing proposals.

It is expected this invitation and further criteria will be received by the end of January.

Elsewhere on this agenda is a report from the Chief Executive recommending the Council decides to set up a cross-party working group to specifically consider the matter of Local Government Reorganisation. It is intended that this cross-party group, supported by the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer would be able to give diligent consideration to this most important of subjects and regularly update Full Council on progress.

THE SPECIFICS OF THE PROPOSALS IN THE MOTION

1. *To oppose the current basis of local government reorganisation in Lancashire, and its insistence on creating unitary councils required to service huge populations of around 500,000 people.*

Very few existing unitary councils have a population over 500k. The average population of county-area unitaries created between 1990 and 2023 is 288k.

Government's stated figure of 500,000 for the population of new Authorities has been consistently questioned.

MHCLG formal responses to questions on this are below.

What is the evidence base for around 500,000?

- *We want to see all of England benefit from devolution, with full devolution coverage across England, at least to the level of Foundation Strategic Authorities, with an ambition to move to the mayoral model. Our principle for scale of geography for strategic authorities will be for a combined population of 1.5 million or above.*
- *While we have not given an upper limit for the size of new unitary councils, areas should consider this principle, along with the others for strategic authorities, when developing proposals for reorganisation.*
- *The government will work with areas to find an optimal devolution outcome, and decisions on new unitary councils will be on a case by case basis. We will prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens and communities above all other issues.*

Where is the evidence that unitaries "can lead to better outcomes, save significant money and improve accountability"?

- *The White Paper states the case for local government reorganisation is that there are significant opportunities available to areas from the creation of suitably sized unitary councils responsible for local government services for that area. Unitarisation can cut wasteful duplication of bodies, reduce the number of politicians and reduce fragmentation of public services.*
- *In 2020 a PwC report set out that there is the opportunity for areas undertaking reorganisation to achieve such efficiencies, when moving to a single unitary structure. The report, "Evaluating the importance of scale in proposals for local government reorganisation", produced for the County Councils Network, estimated that reorganisation of the then 25 two-tier areas to a single unitary would have a one-off cost of £400m, with the potential to realise £2.9bn over five years, with an annual post-implementation net recurring saving of £700m.*
- *We will expect all two-tier areas, and smaller or failing unitaries to develop proposals for reorganisation, creating new unitary councils that are the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more, but there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be on a case-by case basis.*

The District Council Network commentary of this 2020 report is-

The Government is relying on the 2020 County Councils' Network/ PwC report. This claimed that LGR could – in a best case - deliver £3bn net savings over 5 years and

a recurring saving of £700m per year. But this report is very old and significantly overstates the likely savings, in particular:

- It predates the surge in demand for adult social care, children's services, SEND and temporary accommodation, which is expensive for councils to meet and reduces the scope for efficiency savings.
- Many councils in two-tier areas have already delivered significant efficiency savings since 2020, for example by creating shared services or shared management teams.
- The analysis does not factor in further efficiency savings that could be made by existing councils without the need for reorganisation.
- The analysis does not sufficiently factor in optimism bias nor does it cover the real cost of recent unitarisation.

Recent experience of creating larger unitary councils shows it is not a panacea for dealing with deep financial problems in the sector, let alone delivering net savings. For example, one new unitary council is receiving almost £80m in Exceptional Financial Support from the Government in 2024-25 compared to the almost £20m per year savings forecast when it was created in 2023.

2. *To push for and plan for a 'referendum' or meaningful far-reaching consultation on the matter to ascertain the views of local people before any specific realignment of district councils takes place which affect Lancaster City Council's residents. The wording and details of any such referendum or consultation shall be agreed by this council at a later date.*

There have been questions as to Government's intention for meaningful consultation. MHCLG response to the question-

How much consultation will there be on this?

While there is clearly an appetite for reorganisation in parts of England, previous governments have in the past often not been brave enough to follow through – we will get on with delivering what areas need.

- *We intend to formally invite proposals, setting out information on our criteria for sustainable unitary structures, in January. We will expect all councils in an area to work together to develop unitary proposals that are in the best interest of the whole area, rather than developing competing proposals.*
- *We will expect new councils to take a proactive and innovative approach to neighbourhood involvement and community government so that citizens are empowered.*
- *We will deliver this process as quickly as possible, including through legislation where it becomes necessary to ensure progress.*

3. To mandate the Leader of the Council and the executive to build on existing arrangements with Lancashire authorities where shared services deliver better value for money, and to develop a shared vision for the future.

Lancaster City Council already has a good track record of innovation in service delivery and providing value for money, as do many Councils. This has been demonstrated by the delivery of key priorities and outcomes that have positive impacts for our area.

The Government is clear on its intention to structurally reorganise Local Government in two-tier areas irrespective of the extent to which positive local, regional and indeed nationally important outcomes are being delivered through existing systems

The Government's states four aims of reorganisation-

Efficiency savings: it is certain that reorganisation will bring substantial upfront costs and it already has taken considerable capacity. It is much less certain and, in many cases, unlikely that savings will materialise in the real world at the quantum and in the timeframe the Government hopes for. Lancaster City Council has a track record of delivering cashable efficiency savings.

Service transformation: most of the council services on which residents and businesses rely are frontline, place-based services that are most effectively delivered by organisations close to local communities. This has been evidenced in our area time and again. Creating large unitary councils would leave no localised bodies to concentrate on service delivery. The prolonged period of organisational upheaval will certainly distract the Council from the important job of delivering new homes and jobs, improving health and tackling inequality.

Workforce resilience: there is no evidence that the challenges in recruiting and retaining high-calibre staff are confined to smaller councils or would be reduced by creating larger councils. In the short to medium term it is very likely that the prospect of reorganisation will make recruitment even harder, especially in roles and professions that are important for delivering housing and growth.

Simplicity and accountability: do our residents find two-tier government so confusing? District councils have higher levels of resident satisfaction and trust than other parts of government. The international evidence is much clearer that larger councils tend to have a negative impact on democratic accountability, especially trust in councillors, public engagement and voter turnout

4. To send a letter requesting that our two MPs work alongside the City Council to achieve the best possible outcome for local people with respect to the future structure of local governance.

The position of MPs is very important in this process. Formal engagement with our MPs is essential. The District Council Network (DCN) have produced a briefing for

MPs which set out a range of points that are relevant to this debate. This is included as **Appendix B**. It may well be this can be used as the basis of engagement with MPs.

CONCLUSION

This subject is one that deserves the full attention of the Council. It is also a very complex one that needs to be looked at firstly from the perspective of what will deliver the very best outcomes for the people we serve.

This detail provided in this briefing highlights the complexity of the matter.

The information we have makes clear that the Government will ensure Local Government Reorganisation happens.

The position Councils take at this early stage need to be taken with full appreciation of all the implications as we move through what is a very quick process.

Elsewhere on the agenda is a report that recommends a cross party working group, reporting to Full Council, is formed to ensure the Council is able to articulate its position following due consideration of the all the facts as they emerge.

In debating this motion Council should consider carefully what early public position would be to the best advantage of the Council and those we serve.

Mark Davies
Chief Executive
Lancaster City Council

14th Jan 2025

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

The section 151 Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

With respect to point 2. any 'referendum' in this context would not be one regulated by law but would be a consultation exercise to test public opinion. Other than this the Monitoring Officer has no other comments to add to those already in the officer briefing note.

APPENDIX A

Devolution framework- factual summary

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government is setting out an enhanced Devolution Framework – available by default rather than by deal. (Page 47-8).
- The Government wants to see all of England benefit from devolution. By completing the map, the Government will oversee the rebalancing of power from central government so that local leaders can take back control and increase prosperity for local people. It is the government's strong preference that in filling the map, places do so with a Mayor over a strategic geography. (Page 24).
- Areas that agree to take on a Mayor will see major benefits: (Page 25)
 - Prioritisation by the Government to agree and establish devolution in their area.
 - Powers drawn down from the strengthened Devolution Framework, with a significant devolution offer that will continue to grow over time.
 - A clear pathway to unlocking higher levels of devolution reserved for the most mature institutions, including access to the Integrated Settlement which will grow in scope over time.
 - Flexible allocated funding, with a long-term investment fund and, once the area has qualified, funding granted through a flexible Integrated Settlement.
 - A representative sitting round the table of the Council of Nations and Regions with the Prime Minister, First Ministers from all the Devolved Governments and the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.
 - A representative on the Mayoral Council to work with the Deputy Prime Minister on developing devolution and local growth policy.
 - A mandate to develop a Local Growth Plan, with local growth priorities agreed with the Government providing focus for central government and regional collaboration.
 - Membership of the Mayoral Data Council to join up senior data leaders with central government decision-making on data issues that affect them.
- Strategic Authorities – the Government will create in law the concept of a Strategic Authority. All Strategic Authorities will belong to one of the following levels: (Page 28)
 - Foundation Strategic Authorities: these include non-mayoral Combined Authorities and Combined County Authorities automatically, and any Local Authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.
 - Mayoral Strategic Authorities: the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities will automatically begin as Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Those who meet

specified eligibility criteria may be designated as Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities. This unlocks further devolution, most notably an Integrated Settlement.

- The Government's strong preference is for partnerships that bring more than one Local Authority together over a large geography. In exceptional circumstances the Secretary of State will have the power to designate an individual Local Authority as a Foundation Strategic Authority only. (Page 28).
- The Government will legislate to ensure that Strategic Authorities can change structure should local government reorganisation take place, for example, changing from a Combined County Authority to a Combined Authority when a two-tier area becomes single-tier. (Page 28).
- To enable effective working with the public, private and voluntary sectors, the Government will explore a wide-ranging legal power for Strategic Authorities to deliver in their areas of competence. The Government will also explore enabling Mayors to promote economic, social, and environmental aims and convene stakeholders with a corresponding duty on public authorities to respond. It would go hand in hand with a duty to collaborate with constituent Local Authorities and neighbouring Strategic Authorities in delivering these areas of competence.
 - Competences:
 - 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 (Page 29)
- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be able to propose, individually or with others, additional functions to be added to the statutory Devolution Framework, or piloted locally, in order to deliver their areas of competence. The mechanism of requesting further powers is intended to drive innovation and testing to ensure areas continue to trailblaze. This will be an annual process ahead of fiscal events. Proposals will be discussed at the Mayoral Council and then Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be invited to submit a written proposal formally, to which the Government will have a duty to respond. Successful pilots will be considered for addition to the framework. (Page 30).
- When agreeing geographies the Government will consider the following principles. It will not be possible to meet all the principles in all situations and the Government will work with areas to find an optimal outcome:
 - Scale: Strategic Authorities should be of comparable size to existing institutions. The default assumption is for them to have a combined population of 1.5 million or above, but it is accepted that in some places, smaller authorities may be necessary.

- Economies: Strategic Authorities must cover sensible economic geographies with a particular focus on functional economic areas, reflecting current and potential travel-to-work patterns and local labour markets. It is likely that where travel to work areas are small and fragmented, Strategic Authorities will cover multiple travel to work areas.
 - Contiguity: Any proposed geography must be contiguous across its constituent councils (either now or with a clear plan to ensure continuity in the future through agreed local government reorganisation).
 - No 'devolution islands': Geographies must not create devolution 'islands' by leaving areas which are too small to go it alone or which do not have natural partners.
 - Delivery: Geographies should ensure the effective delivery of key functions including Spatial Development Strategies, Local Transport Plans and Get Britain Working Plans.
 - Alignment: The Government will seek to promote alignment between devolution boundaries and other public sector boundaries.
 - Identity: A vital element of successful devolution is the ability for local residents to engage with and hold their devolved institutions to account – and local identity plays a key role in this. (Page 31).
- The Government will legislate for a ministerial directive, which will enable it to create Strategic Authorities in any remaining places where local leaders in that region have not been able to agree how to access devolved powers. (Page 35).

London/GLA

- The Government will also explore whether changes are needed to the system governing the disposal of Transport for London operational land and the way in which transport funding is agreed for London.
- The Government will work with the Mayor of London to compare the powers and policy approaches of other global city authorities. This will be led by a new working group sponsored jointly by Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Greater London Authority. (Page 36-37).

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will facilitate a programme of local government reorganisation for two tier areas and for those unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services for their residents. The Government will deliver this process as quickly as possible, including through legislation where it becomes necessary to ensure progress. (Page 100).
- The Government will therefore want to see stronger community arrangements when reorganisation happens in the way councils engage at a neighbourhood

or area level. The Government will also rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal Local Authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice. (Page 100).

- The Government will expect all two-tier areas and smaller or failing unitaries to develop proposals for reorganisation. The Government will take a phased approach to delivery, taking into account where reorganisation can unlock devolution, where areas are keen to proceed at pace or where it can help address wider failings. However, the Government are clear that reorganisation should not delay devolution and plans for both should be complementary. (Page 100).
- New unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more, but there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including for devolution, and decisions will be on a case-by-case basis. (Page 100).
- The Government will sequence these reforms alongside devolution ambitions for each area. The Government will expect new councils to take a proactive and innovative approach to neighbourhood involvement and community governance so that citizens are empowered. (Page 101).
- The Government expects all councils in an area to work together to develop unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area, rather than developing competing proposals. The Government will also expect all councils in an area to work with them to bring about these changes as swiftly as possible. The Government will also consider which governance models available to local authorities across the sector will best support their decision making. (Page 101).
- The Government will work closely with local leaders to explore what support they might need to develop robust proposals and implement new structures, including taking decisions to postpone local elections where this will help to smooth the transition process. The Government will learn from the experience and successes of others who have been through the process. (Page 101).
- The Government will write to council leaders as soon as possible to formally invite proposals, setting out information on criteria for sustainable unitary structures, how and when to submit proposals and how the Government intends to respond to proposals. Reorganisation should not delay devolution so the Government will work closely with areas on complementary plans and will deliver an ambitious first wave of reorganisation in this Parliament. (Page 101).

Funding

The White Paper announced that:

- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will become eligible for the Integrated Settlement, which will commence at the following Spending Review provided a sufficient preparation period has passed. The scope of Integrated Settlements will be confirmed at each Spending Review on the basis of functional responsibilities, and their value by a formulaic process. Integrated Settlements will have a single systematised approach to spending controls and a single, streamlined, overarching assurance and accountability framework coordinated by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. More information is available at GOV.UK: [Integrated settlements for Mayoral Combined Authorities - GOV.UK](#). (Page 48).
- The Devolution Framework also commits to a simplified funding landscape for Mayoral and Foundation Strategic Authorities. This will include: (Page 49)
 - For Mayoral Strategic Authorities, consolidated funding pots covering: local growth, place, housing, and regeneration; non-apprenticeship adult skills; and transport. These will commence in the following Spending Review.
 - For Foundation Strategic Authorities, MHCLG will provide dedicated local growth allocations, decided by formulae, and with lighter-touch investment sign-off.
 - The Government will reform the local growth funding landscape at the following Spending Review, rationalising the number of funds and moving away from competitions. Future local growth funding will recognise the centrality of Strategic Authorities for economic growth. The Government will continue providing funding to Mayoral Combined Authorities with Investment Zones to create additional jobs and economic growth in areas that have economically underperformed in the past.
- The 30-year investment funds will remain a core part of the Devolution Framework, with existing arrangements honoured, new areas receiving this funding on their creation, and funding for new institutions standardised to increase fairness. The Government will also remove gateway reviews for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities which have passed Gateway One or equivalent. (Page 49).
- Mayoral Combined and Combined County Authorities have been able to raise a mayoral precept should they choose since legislation made in 2016 and 2023 respectively. However, they cannot use this on their full range of functions, often including vital growth levers like bus services and adult skills. The Government will legislate to correct this, raising the value for money of this existing power. (Page 49).
- In the 2024 Autumn Budget, the Government announced £1.3 billion of new grant funding in 2025/26 for local government to deliver core services. As part

of this the Government will introduce a new 'Recovery Grant', worth £600 million, which will increase the efficiency of funding by targeting money towards areas with greater need and demand for services (the Government has used deprivation as a proxy for this), and less ability to raise income locally. (Page 96).

- In future, the Government will provide multi-year funding settlements (page 96).
- The Government will reform the Local Government Finance System to put councils on the road to recovery – building on the proposals set out in the previous government's Fair Funding Review. (Page 96).
- The Government will consider how a new model of business rate retention could better and more consistently support Strategic Authorities to drive growth. (Page 97).
- The Government will reform the use of funding pots...the Government will reduce the number of restrictive grants to Local Authorities – wherever possible, resource funding for service delivery will be consolidated into the Local Government Finance Settlement. The Government will also rationalise the number of capital-focused growth funds... including consolidating this funding into Integrated Settlements for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities where relevant. (Page 98).

Audit and standards

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will fundamentally reform the local audit system, rebuilding the vital early warning system to recover a key part of assurance mechanisms, restore local government standards, and ensure transparency, and avoid returning to a bloated Audit Commission or allow mission creep to expand the remit of government bodies in the sector. As a first step, the Government will close the Office for Local Government. (Page 103).
- In line with Sir Tony Redmond's recommendations, the Government will legislate to radically simplify the system, bringing as many audit functions as possible into one body which will also offer insights drawn from audits. The Government will shortly engage with the sector, including with key audit stakeholders on how best to move functions into the organisation on audit, subject to legislation. (Page 103).
- The Government will be embedding lessons learnt from the development of the parliamentary Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme. The Government will consult on proposals including: (Page 103-104).
 - A mandatory code of conduct – to establish a higher minimum standard of expected behaviours and ensure consistency, reflecting the

Government's commitment to public service and to updating the 30-year code to cover discrimination, bullying, use of social media, and other issues not featuring in the current minimum requirements.

- A requirement for principal Local Authorities to convene formal Standards Committees – to ensure all Local Authorities have formal, transparent processes to uphold and promote standards.
- A role for a national body to deal with the most serious cases and appeals, as was the case under the former system with the Standards Board for England, subject to discussions with the sector.
- Powers to suspend, including imposing premises and facilities bans – to allow Local Authorities to enforce their own standards. The government believes that councils need the ability to address serious misconduct with powers to suspend councillors for a maximum of six months, with the option to withhold allowances where deemed appropriate.
- Disqualification if subject to suspension more than once – to curb the risk of “repeat offending” and empower councils to signal that poor behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Subject to discussions with the sector the Government will explore immediate disqualification in certain instances of serious misconduct.
- Interim suspension whilst under investigation – to reassure the public that action is being taken. This could be used in serious cases that may involve protracted investigations or the police, for example alleged fraud or assault.
- Publication of all code breach investigation outcomes – to enhance transparency, giving the public the opportunity to check their council's record on maintaining good conduct.

Members and workforce

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will continue to work with the sector on support and development for elected members, including addressing barriers to attracting and retaining them. To support this work, the Government proposes the following improvements: (104-105)
 - Workforce development: the Government 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, while ensuring the workforce is set-up for the future.
 - Remote attendance: this government is formally seeking views on proposals to enable elected members to remotely attend formal council meetings, the intent being that an elected member who needs to attend a meeting virtually will have the option and flexibility to do so. This reform will also enable sitting councillors who are not able to physically attend meetings on an on-going or temporary basis to represent the communities they serve.
 - Proxy voting: The Government is seeking views on enabling elected members to use proxy voting – so that a member of a decision-making

body may delegate their voting power to another representative to enable a vote in their absence, such as in cases when they are temporarily unable to participate in meetings due to personal circumstances for a limited period.

- Address publication requirements: The Government proposes to remove the requirements for a local government member's home address to be published.
- The Government will introduce proposals limiting individuals from holding the office of Member of Parliament and Mayor simultaneously, as is already the case for Mayors who are the Police and Crime Commissioner for their area. (Page 111).

Public service reform and prevention

The White Paper announced that:

- Pursue an ambition to realign public authority boundaries, so that over time, public services are delivered over the same areas as Strategic Authority boundaries. The Government's long-term aim is for public service boundaries – including those of police, probation, fire and health services – and those of Strategic Authorities, to align. Any changes to public service boundaries will be made in consultation with stakeholders and considering the impact on service delivery. The Government will look for practical solutions to allow Mayors to deliver where service boundaries are non-coterminous, considering the benefits on a case-by-case basis. (Page 43)
- Ensure that Strategic Authorities, in partnership with local authorities and other local institutions where relevant, are considered as the default delivery institution for new programmes or activity where these are appropriate for local delivery and in their areas of competence... There will be a presumption that funding flows through Integrated Settlements for Enhanced Mayoral Strategic Authorities. (Page 43).
- Ensure key Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Arm's Length Bodies, such as Homes England, Network Rail and National Highways, have appropriate regard to relevant Strategic Authority strategies and the shared growth priorities from the Local Growth Plan for the area in their work. (Page 43).
- Establish the National Wealth Fund with a strong regional objective to unleash the full potential of cities and regions. It will work in close partnership with Mayors to support investable propositions in their Local Growth Plans, as well as with Devolved Governments, and with other local leaders to support their investment plans, being led by local needs. The National Wealth Fund will have increased resources in both its Local Authority and Banking and Investments teams. It will conduct more outreach to identify expanded project pipelines and structure innovative transactions with project sponsors, industry, Local Authorities and government departments. It will work collaboratively, focusing on additionality and never crowding out private investment. (Page 44)

- With the support of the Government, Strategic Authorities will collaborate with councils to deliver reform and innovation, as they have the geographical footprint to coordinate strategic priorities and bring together disparate parts of the public sector. Strategic Authorities can also enable and support Local Authorities in their role as convenors of place, bringing together public service providers and other stakeholders to drive people centred services (Page 81).
- To complement the convening role that Mayors will be granted via the new Devolution Framework, the Government will continue to work with the sector to identify where else they can add value, including considering the devolution of any funding relating to public service reform and prevention. (Page 81).
- The Government has allocated £100 million to deliver innovative projects to support the development of new approaches to improving public services, partnering with local leaders and Mayors. As part of this new approach, the Government will focus on empowering Local Authorities as the convenors of place to bring together public service providers and other stakeholders to improve outcomes for individuals and communities. (Page 97).
- The Government will explore opportunities to work with Local and Strategic Authorities to develop locally-led approaches to public service reform, drawing together service providers in their areas to improve outcomes for residents. The Government will work with the sector to design and implement this agenda. (Page 98).

Governance

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will put into legislation the statutory functions and governance arrangements for each level of Strategic Authority. Members of that level will receive the corresponding functions automatically (Page 29-30).
- The Government wants to introduce a more consistent, transparent and effective set of voting arrangements (Page 29-30).
- When the framework becomes law, it will override any existing governance arrangements (Page 29-30).
- In Mayoral Strategic Authorities, a majority vote which includes the Mayor will be required to approve decisions on the use of most functions. Specific functions set out in the Devolution Framework will be exercisable only by the Mayor. In Foundation Strategic Authorities, most decisions will require a majority but key strategic decisions will require unanimity. The governance arrangements for the setting of Combined Authority and Combined County Authority budgets and transport levies will also be standardised. These changes will not apply to the Greater London Authority or any single Local Authority designated as a Foundation Strategic Authority, given their different legal constitution. (Page 30).

Mayoral devolution

- To provide consistency across the country, the Government will remove the ability of Strategic Authorities to call Mayors by another name, in common with local government councillors and UK MPs, regardless of the ward or constituency they represent. (Page 32).

Non-Mayoral devolution

- The Government will also consider proposals for Local Authorities to work in partnership through the establishment of a Combined Authority or Combined County Authority, as a platform to consider mayoral devolution in the future. (Page 32).

District councils

- In areas with two tiers of local government, before moving to a single tier, the Government will establish Combined County Authorities but not Combined Authorities. In those cases, while districts will not be constituent members, the Government expects effective levels of collaboration to be demonstrated between constituent members and district councils, especially where the district council covers the primary city or economy in that county. (Page 32).

Capacity building

The White Paper announced that:

- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will become eligible for the Integrated Settlement, which will commence at the following Spending Review provided a sufficient preparation period has passed. The scope of Integrated Settlements will be confirmed at each Spending Review on the basis of functional responsibilities, and their value by a formulaic process. Integrated Settlements will have a single systematised approach to spending controls and a single, streamlined, overarching assurance and accountability framework coordinated by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government. More information is available at GOV.UK: [Integrated settlements for Mayoral Combined Authorities - GOV.UK](#). (Page 48).
- The Government will work with Local Authorities and Strategic Authorities to consider the best way to provide resource funding to Strategic Authorities such as via the Local Government Finance Settlement. This will be guided by the principle that there is a consistent approach to the powers and responsibilities of Strategic Authorities, in line with the Devolution Framework. (Page 109).
- Where a Strategic Authority takes on powers which are currently funded outside the Local Government Finance Settlement or the integrated settlements, such as Mayoral Capacity Funding, MHCLG will work with the relevant department or organisation to explore funding this through these routes. (Page 109).

- Subject to Spending Review decisions, new Strategic Authorities will continue to receive Mayoral Capacity Funding to kickstart their organisations and the Government will also review how Mayoral Capacity Funding is calculated and ensure any changes are consistent with the Devolution Framework. (Page 109).
- The Government will introduce a secondment scheme between central government and Strategic Authorities, which will include facilitating the placement of civil servants in Strategic Authority officer roles, including senior positions. (Page 109).
- The Government will work alongside Bloomberg Philanthropies and others to build a capacity support offer that will help local leaders deliver results. (Page 109)
- The Government intends to support Mayors in collaborating at pan-regional level and creating convening bodies whose purpose, priorities and membership are decided at a regional level, and working with existing regional organisations such as Sub-National Transport bodies. (Page 109)
- Strategic Authorities will need a leadership team who can drive policy forward across the responsibilities of the Authority and represent it externally. The Government will explore how to better recognise their contribution and leadership. (Page 110)
- Government will legislate so that Mayors are able to appoint and remunerate 'Commissioners' who would be able to support the delivery of key functions. They would not be members of the Strategic Authority, and the roles would be expected to reflect the areas of competence, such as a Transport Commissioner. (Page 110)

Accountability and scrutiny

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will explore, working across departments:
- A public devolution evaluation on the outcomes of devolution to date, including the Integrated Settlements, working with areas to understand the right balance of responsibilities between central and local government.
- A feasibility study for how the impact of different devolution commitments, including the Integrated Settlement, can be assessed.
- Delivering ongoing process and impact evaluation to capture evidence on devolution as it becomes available, looking at delivery and implementation, future trends, and impact in place. (Page 46).

- The Government will set out and measure progress on the key services and outcomes Strategic Authorities are expected to deliver, to be clearer on priorities and reduce micromanagement. (Page 106).
- The Integrated Settlements that Established Strategic Authorities are set to receive will be supported by a single streamlined accountability framework, rather than multiple frameworks administered by different departments. This single accountability framework will clarify the roles between the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 'system Accounting Officer', the Accounting Officer of contributing departments, and the Chief Executive of the Mayoral Combined Authority, including interaction with scrutiny and Managing Public Money guidance. It will be incorporated into the English Devolution Accountability Framework. (Page 107).
- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be held to account for the outcomes associated with their Integrated Settlement via an outcomes framework aligned to national missions, other national priorities and local economic concerns. The outcomes framework will provide a structured approach to defining, measuring and reporting on performance on Integrated Settlement delivery during the Spending Review period. The outcomes framework will identify the desired outcomes for assessing performance across the policy responsibilities devolved through the Integrated Settlement, as well as the indicators, outputs and targets that will be used to track progress in the Spending Review period. (Page 107).
- The outcomes framework will:
 - Provide a single, streamlined approach to accountability and reporting to central government.
 - Align local priorities and national priorities with Local Growth Plans as the guiding star for investment.
 - Become a scalable feature of the accountability landscape as devolution is deepened and widened.
 - Monitor activity which can be genuinely influenced within the Integrated Settlements' themes whilst moving away from existing programme and project-specific monitoring of inputs and outputs that central government track.
 - Provide sufficient evidence to inform delivery performance within the Spending Review period (Page 107).
- The Government will work with the sector to explore:
 - A review of the Scrutiny Protocol.
 - How to improve external scrutiny of value for money on local public spending, including exploring a Local Public Accounts Committee model alongside reforms to local audit.
 - How to ensure the oversight and transparency of decision making and activity conducted by the bodies that Strategic Authorities establish.
 - How to clarify lines of accountability, including through creating a local single point of accountability for value for money, exploring models such as Local Accounting Officers.

- Ensuring the system of stewardship, as it applies to Strategic Authorities, is operating as effectively as it can, including the case for setting up an annual conversation with each area. (Page 107-08).
- The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will shortly develop a local media strategy. As part of that strategy, the Government will explore whether there is more that Local Authorities can do to support the vital role that local media plays, for example through increased openness in providing local journalists with access to information. (Page 108).

Inclusive economic growth and Local growth plans

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will create a statutory requirement for all Mayoral Strategic Authorities to produce a Local Growth Plan. (Page 41).
- Local Growth Plans will play a key role in implementing and rolling out Integrated Settlements, being reflected in the outcomes framework. (Page 41).
- The Government will work with Mayoral Strategic Authorities to agree a limited number of shared strategic priorities, to act as a focal point for collaboration. (Page 41).
- Local Growth Plans will galvanise action and investment, including through setting out a pipeline of investment opportunities... The English Devolution Bill will also introduce a reciprocal requirement on Strategic Authorities to work with Local Government Pension Scheme Administering Authorities and their asset pools to develop investment opportunities that are appropriate for pensions investment. (Page 41).
- Foundation Strategic Authorities... will set out a vision for growth in their area, building on existing local economic strategies where these exist. As they become Mayoral Strategic Authorities... they will be required to update these to produce full Local Growth Plans. (Page 41).
- The Department for Business and Trade will:
 - Establish bilateral strategic partnership forums with every Mayoral Strategic Authority, building on successful models in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands to strengthen existing partnership working, align national and local policymaking, and drive delivery of local growth priorities as identified by areas through their Local Growth Plans.
 - Publish a Small Business Strategy, next year via a command paper, setting out the Government's vision for a new approach to business support, including more devolution in England (through Integrated Settlements where relevant) and a strengthened role for Mayors. The

Department for Business and Trade will engage Mayoral Strategic Authorities to shape the Small Business Strategy's development and implementation. This will include consideration of how national, local, and devolved business support schemes – spanning domestic growth, exports, and investment – can best align to increase business growth and productivity. Following wide consultation, the Strategy will also set out further detail of a new Business Growth Service, bringing a range of existing core services under the Business Growth Service banner, working hand in glove with local government, Strategic Authorities, devolved governments, and the Growth Hubs network.

- Work with Mayoral Strategic Authorities and local partners across the North of England in the first instance and then the Midlands and South of England to roll out a tailored export growth programme to high growth businesses in other Mayoral Strategic Authorities.
 - Continue to integrate Growth Hubs into Mayoral Strategic Authorities, with funding forming part of the Integrated Settlement in Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities. This will see Mayoral Strategic Authorities taking the lead in managing and focusing local business support, and delivering a core suite of business growth products, as part of an England-wide Growth Hubs network. (Page 66).
- The Office for Investment will work with Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities to develop and jointly market investible propositions for significant, commercially viable opportunities, in order to land key strategic investments. This offer will be prioritised for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities initially and extended out to other Mayoral Strategic Authorities where possible. The Office for Investment will also explore establishing a senior official-level forum with Mayoral Strategic Authorities on a pan-regional basis. (Page 67).
 - The Government will continue to work with Strategic Authorities to ensure that the business voice continues to play an important role. (Page 111).

Employment and skills

The White Paper announced that:

- Central to the Government's approach is to provide Strategic Authorities the devolution of non-apprenticeship adults skills funding. For Mayoral Strategic Authorities, this will combine and un-ringfence funding for the Adult Skills Fund, Free Courses for Jobs, and Skills Bootcamps from 2026/27 onwards. For Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities, this will form part of their Integrated Settlements from 2025/26 onwards. Foundation Authorities will continue to receive devolved Adult Skills Fund alongside ringfenced funding for Free Courses for Jobs and Skills Bootcamp. (Page 54).
- The Government will establish joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plans model involving Strategic Authorities and the designated Employer Representative Bodies. Under this model, and subject to any necessary legislation and statutory guidance needed to implement these changes: (Page

54-55).

- Employer Representative Body designation: When designating a new Employer Representative Body, Strategic Authorities will be involved in the process, with their comments informing the Secretary of State's decision to designate. Going further the Secretary of State for Education would not designate (without good reason) an Employer Representative Body unless the Strategic Authority was satisfied in the choice.
 - Local Skills Improvement Plan development: In Strategic Authority areas, Local Skills Improvement Plan development will commence with the Strategic Authority establishing the sector skills priorities and sharing relevant data with the designated Employer Representative Body. These will inform the development of the plan and provide the framework within which it exists, alongside Local Growth Plans, the Industrial Strategy, Skills England's assessment of skills needs, and employer input. The Government will ensure Strategic Authorities and Employer Representative Bodies work together on all stages of the Local Skills Improvement Plan and its governance, with local discretion on the arrangements to deliver this.
 - Local Skills Improvement Plan approval: Strategic Authorities and Employer Representative Bodies will be required to confirm they are both content with the plan before it is sent to the Secretary of State for Education (through Skills England) for approval. In the rare instances where the Employer Representative Body and Strategic Authority cannot agree a Local Skills Improvement Plan, and recognising the vital importance of all parts of the country having up-to-date Local Skills Improvement Plans, it may be escalated to the Secretary of State for Education. However, even in these cases, the new requirement to include the Strategic Authority's sector skills priorities within the Local Skills Improvement Plans would remain. A Local Skills Improvement Plan could not be approved if this was not the case.
 - The Government expects expect Local Skills Improvement Plans to be clearly linked to Local Growth Plans, relevant parts of the Industrial Strategy and Skills England's assessment of skills needs.
 - To ensure the policy is implemented effectively, the Government will align Local Skills Improvement Plan geographies with Strategic Authority geographies wherever possible. Strategic Authorities and Employer Representative Bodies will work with Skills England to ensure insights from Local Skills Improvement Plans are fed into the national picture.
- The Government will continue to ensure that there is a national and consistent approach to education and training for 16–19-year-olds. However, Mayoral Strategic Authorities have a crucial role in ensuring there are clear pathways of progression from education into both further and higher education and local employment opportunities and the Government will work with Mayoral Strategic Authorities to develop the tools needed to support them in delivering this. Initial steps include: (Page 55-56).

- Ensuring Mayoral Strategic Authorities have regular, structured opportunities to feed their priorities into the Department for Education's annual strategic conversations with colleges to inform and help the further education sector in shaping provision that includes clear pathways of progression from education into further/higher education or local employment opportunities.
 - Working with Mayoral Strategic Authorities to use their convening powers and influence to secure work and industry placements with local employers that relate to 16-19 education, training and career paths
 - Providing joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model will also give Strategic Authorities a clear mechanism to help inform the skills offer locally. As part of these new joint ownership arrangements for the Local Skills Improvement Plans model, Strategic Authorities and Employer Representative Bodies can ensure the Local Skills Improvement Plan facilitates opportunities for 16–19-year-olds to undertake apprenticeships, education and training that lead to good quality employment opportunities.
- As announced in the Get Britain Working White Paper, Strategic Authorities will be responsible for producing a local Get Britain Working Plan, focused on reducing economic inactivity. To support these plans, the Government will devolve funding for supported employment provision to tackle inactivity to Strategic Authorities via grant funding, so they can design and deliver an offer that is shaped around local priorities and provision. For Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities, this funding will form part of their Integrated Settlement. (Page 58).
- All Mayoral Strategic Authorities will have a role in co-designing any future non-Jobcentre Plus employment support. Their subsequent role in commissioning or delivery will be determined as part of agreeing the policy objectives, design and funding parameters of any future programme. The Government remains committed to ensuring that support remains evidence-based, represents value for money, and is aligned with Department for Work and Pensions delivered support. (Page 58).
- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will play an integral role in the design and delivery of this support, subject to evaluation and readiness conditions being met, with a clear outcomes and accountability framework. The Government will also explore ahead of the next Spending Review whether there is scope for devolution of relevant funding as part of Integrated Settlements, subject to a transition period enabling authorities to demonstrate readiness and build capacity locally. (Page 58).
- To create a holistic, joined-up employment, skills, and health offer, the Government will work in close partnership with Strategic Authorities to design, develop, and test the National Jobs and Careers Service. These tests will be designed to help discover how to locally shape services, whilst the Government maintains overall accountability for them. As a first step towards developing a

more locally responsive and engaged organisation, the Government will more closely align Jobcentre Plus geographies with existing Mayoral Strategic Authorities. (Page 59).

- The framework also gives Mayoral Strategic Authorities a central role in convening local youth careers provision within the national context. (Page 59).

Housing

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will strengthen Local Authorities' ability to take over the management of vacant residential premises and introduce large selective licensing schemes to improve conditions in the private rental sector, without requiring the Secretary of State's approval. (Page 94).
- All Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be given control of grant funding to support regeneration and housing delivery. This will be delivered as part of the Integrated Settlement in Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities from 2026/27 onwards. Further details on this will be agreed as part of the Spending Review process. (Page 62).
- All Mayoral Strategic Authorities will now have access to Strategic Place Partnerships with Homes England partnerships, subject to a period of joint working on pipeline development and delivery planning. (Page 62).
- In the short term, the Government will increase Homes England's accountability to Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities. This will include giving Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities the ability to steer and monitor Homes England's progress in delivering on objectives agreed through their Strategic Place Partnerships, and set out in their wider plans, and to escalate any issues to ministers. (Page 62).
- Homes England will move to a more regional and place-based operating model to align its structures and ways of working to the Government's devolution agenda. Homes England will also work with Foundation Strategic Authorities on a targeted basis to develop a shared development pipeline and joint action plan, using a continuous market engagement approach to identify the authorities with capacity for accelerating development. (Page 62).
- Over time, the Government is seeking to move towards full devolution of funds and delivery for affordable housing. As an interim step, Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be given the ability – through their Strategic Place Partnerships with Homes England – to set the strategic direction of any future affordable housing programme in their area, including shaping the tenure mix and identifying priority sites for housing development to be supported by grant. As part of this, there will be a clear approach to ensuring responsibility of Homes England to the Mayors (recognising constraints such as market demand) and a clear framework on the specific decisions Mayors will be able to take, agreed

with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and to be implemented by Homes England. To support planning, this will include upfront indicative spend per Established Mayoral Strategic Authority, subject to suitable projects being identified. (Page 62-3).

- While it is the Government's ambition for every area of England to be covered by a Strategic Authority, this will be a gradual process... Where no Strategic Authority is in place or is planned to be in place, the Government will take a power through the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill to direct defined groupings of upper-tier county councils, unitary councils, and in some cases Foundation Strategic Authorities to deliver a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS). Given the intention to have all SDSs produced by Strategic Authorities in due course, the Government believes it makes sense in the first instance for these groupings of Local Authorities to be guided by the sensible geography criteria that have been set out for agreeing new devolution deals... The arrangements for agreeing SDS in areas without a Strategic Authority will follow the same principles as Foundation Strategic Authorities. (Page 64).
- SDSs will guide development for the Local Planning Authorities in the area, and their Local Plans will need to be in general conformity with the Spatial Development Strategy. However, Local Planning Authorities should not delay development of Local Plans while they await the adoption of SDS. Relevant Local Plans should continue to be updated or developed alongside the SDS process. (Page 64).
- Areas will be able to set SDS to enable their area to grow, identify the infrastructure that is needed and strategic locations for development. This will include an obligation to apportion an assessment of the housing need of the Strategic Authority across its constituent members. The Government intends for that assessment to be the cumulative total of the local housing need of each constituent member, as determined by the Standard Method set out in national planning policy. The apportioned figure set for each constituent member in the SDS will then be the minimum housing requirement for the purposes of each member authority's next Local Plan. Agreement on the precise distribution of housing need will be agreed through the SDS development process. The Government expects that the authorities producing SDSs will be able to encourage the pooling of resources and prioritising of efforts across their constituent authorities to meet housing need. (Page 64).
- The content of SDSs will be kept deliberately high level with the dual purpose of preserving detailed policy and site allocations for Local Planning Authorities through their Local Plans, and for enabling strategic plans to be produced quickly, with the intention of achieving national coverage by the end of this Parliament... There will be a formal duty for responsible authorities to consult district councils on the development of the SDS and a route for district councils to raise concerns with the planning inspectorate. (Page 65).
- To ensure universal coverage of strategic plans, the Government will legislate for intervention powers, which will enable the Government to intervene where plans are not forthcoming to the timeframe. These will include directing on

timetables or particular policy content such as the distribution of housing need, through to taking over the preparation of an SDS and adopting it on behalf of strategic planning authorities. (Page 65).

- The Government will also act to give councils stronger tools to improve their housing markets, including removing the requirement to seek approval from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government for larger selective licensing schemes, so Local Authorities can take more action to tackle specific and persistent issues in private rented sector properties. (Page 100).

Strategic planning

The White Paper announced that:

- All areas, both areas with a Strategic Authority and those without, will be required to develop Spatial Development Strategies over a strategic geography, and within a defined timeframe:
 - In Mayoral Strategic Authorities, Mayors will be empowered to develop and propose the Spatial Development Strategy for their areas, working closely with Strategic Authority members. Spatial Development Strategies will be approved with the support of a majority of constituent members, including the Mayor. In cases of deadlock, the Mayor will have a casting vote, and where the threshold for agreement cannot be reached, Mayors will be able to refer the proposal to the Secretary of State for decision.
 - In Foundation Strategic Authorities, there will be the same requirement and priority to produce a Spatial Development Strategy, although in some cases this may need to be agreed with neighbouring authorities over a larger geography. Where the Strategic Authority covers multiple Local Authorities, members will need to work together to deliver these plans, with the support of a majority of constituent members required to adopt the proposal. Where the Strategic Authority is unable to reach an agreement to a suitable time frame, there will be powers of intervention available to the Secretary of State to ensure the Spatial Development Strategy can be progressed. (Page 61).
- Once a Spatial Development Strategy is in place, Mayors will therefore also have access to development management powers allowing them to intervene in planning applications of potential strategic importance. To support the delivery of strategic infrastructure projects, Mayors will have powers to raise a Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy. (Page 61).
- Mayors will continue to have powers to apply compulsory purchase orders and to establish Mayoral Development Corporations. The Government will also extend to them the power to make Mayoral Development Orders. Mayors are currently required to secure the consent of the relevant Local Planning Authority to exercise these powers, however, the Government will review these arrangements to ensure they remain fit for purpose in the context of the

strengthened role that Mayors are expected to play in strategic planning and development. (Page 61-2).

- The Government will also provide support for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities to establish their own public sector land commissions, for example by providing relevant contacts with partners, departments, and stakeholders, and engagement with the Government on specific barriers, opportunities, and sites. (Page 62).

Transport

The White Paper announced that:

- For Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities, the Integrated Settlement will include local transport funding streams, including City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement funding for eligible authorities from the start of City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements 2 in 2027/28. (Page 49).
- Foundation and Mayoral Strategic Authorities will also have funding consolidation, with greater consolidation, autonomy, and flexibility for places with a Mayor. Places will be held accountable through a transport-specific accountability framework with a proportionate outcomes framework and metrics. (Page 49).
- The Government is committed to ensuring long-term financial sustainability for Transport for London and will work with them to develop a plan for achieving this from 2026/27 onwards as part of the Spending Review in the Spring. (Page 49).

Roads

- Mayoral Strategic Authorities will set up and coordinate a Key Route Network on behalf of the Mayor, allowing the most important local roads to be strategically managed. Mayors will hold a Power of Direction over this network to support delivery of their agreed Local Transport Plan. The Government will review the effectiveness of the Power of Direction two years after implementation. (Page 50).
- Responsibility for local roads will remain with constituent authorities, unless otherwise agreed locally. The Government will encourage Strategic Authorities to work to streamline arrangements across their area, for example, through a single set of highway design standards. (Page 50).
- Some Strategic Authorities have taken on some highways functions concurrently with their constituent authorities and the Government will continue to explore if standardised powers would add value. (Page 50).
- Local Transport Authorities will be empowered to regulate on-street micromobility schemes (like hire bikes), so local areas can shape these

schemes around their needs, connect people to public transport, and tackle the scourge of badly parked cycles and e-cycles. (Page 50).

- Subject to consultation, it is proposed that the Government will devolve approval of local Lane Rental schemes to Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Lane Rental schemes enable Local Highway Authorities to charge for works on busy roads at busy times with the aim of minimising disruption. Outside of Mayoral Strategic Authority areas, it is proposed that approval will remain with the Secretary of State. (Page 50).
- To help speed up development, the Government also plans to devolve approvals for stopping up orders nationally, in line with London. These powers allow Local Highway Authorities to permanently close roads, subject to planning consent. Other minor road consents will be devolved to Mayors and Local Highway Authorities and changes to tolls on certain tolled undertakings will be devolved to Mayors. (Page 50).
- National Highways is committed to formalising and strengthening its relationship with Mayoral Strategic Authorities, ensuring a more cohesive approach to the management and development of England's strategic road network alongside local roads. One example is action to address pavement parking at a national level: the Government will publish a formal response to the 2020 pavement parking consultation. The Government will expect Strategic Authorities to play a leading role in developing a consistent approach to enforcement across their area, using available powers as appropriate. (Page 51).

Rail

- The Government will consult on a statutory role for Mayors in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network ahead of the legislation required to establish the functions of Great British Railways. Subject to royal assent, the Government will publish guidance outlining the core components that each tier of Strategic Authority can expect, reflecting the need for this to be flexible, place-based, and bespoke. (Page 51).
- Greater reciprocal data-sharing, including through the Rail Data Marketplace, aligning this with the DfT 'open by default' position and the MHCLG-led data partnership principles. (Page 51).
- If they meet transparent criteria, Mayors will also be given the option for greater control over appropriate local stations. The Government will also work with Strategic Authorities to explore how the considerable land value potential in rail-owned land could drive regeneration, commercial and housing opportunities. (Page 51).
- Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will have a right to request further rail devolution, up to full devolution of defined local services. The Government will publish guidance to establish a clear and transparent process for this. (Page 51).

- Great British Railways will reform the rail ticketing system to make it simpler for passengers and drive innovation. The Government will work in close collaboration with Mayoral Strategic Authorities to deliver these shared ambitions, building on existing pay-as-you-go rail pilots. Priority will be given to Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities in city regions with existing ticketing schemes across other transport modes. (Page 51-2).

Bus and Active Travel

- The Buses Bill will empower all Local Transport Authorities to decide whether to pursue bus franchising, a strengthened Enhanced Partnership, or publicly owned bus companies. The Department for Transport will publish updated franchising guidance and build its capacity to provide tangible support to Local Transport Authorities.
- The Government expects Strategic Authorities to develop plans to decarbonise and reduce air pollution from their local bus fleet, including how and when emissions reductions will be delivered.
- Active Travel England will support Strategic Authorities to increase capability and address skill gaps to ensure a consistent approach to safety and accessibility for all users, with a right to request capability assessments for their constituent authorities. (Page 52).

Measures applicable to all local transport authorities

- The Government intends to:
 - Remove outdated requirements for Secretary of State consent to applications for Special Event Orders, dropped kerbs, conversions of footpaths to cycle tracks, and the construction of cattle grids, as well as exploring further the devolution of traffic enforcement powers. Removing Secretary of State consent requirements will empower local leaders and speed up decision making.
 - Further simplify local transport funding matched to the key transport modes and functions.
 - Set an expectation to develop an electric vehicle chargepoint strategy. This could be done within the Local Transport Plan.
 - The Government will consult on whether to make all Local Transport Authorities (including Strategic Authorities) responsible for taxi and private hire vehicle licensing. (Page 53).

Local Transport Plans

- To make sure Local Transport Plans are as effective as possible, the Government will:
 - Require that Local Transport Plans have regard to all other Strategic Authority plans and strategies, like the Spatial Development Strategy.

- Require that constituent authorities carry out their functions with regard to the Local Transport Plan – for example, where they are using their powers over local roads
- Update the framework for Local Transport Plans, including publishing new guidance to support integrated local transport networks across the country. (Page 54).

High streets and town centres

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government has retained the Long Term Plan for Towns and will reform it into a new regeneration programme. The programme will work in partnership with 75 towns across the UK. The programme will build capacity by developing and strengthening the skills, resources, structures and capabilities of individuals and organisations to drive and sustain improvements for local residents. The Government will ensure that it is shaped and delivered for the long-term by the communities it is intended to benefit. (Page 93).
- The Government will replace the community ‘Right to Bid’ with a strengthened ‘Right to Buy’ Assets of Community Value, creating a more robust pathway to community asset ownership. The Government will support community ownership by funding projects through the Community Ownership Fund in 2024/25, allowing communities across the country to purchase cherished assets that are at risk of being lost. (Page 94).
- The Government will seek to support high streets by strengthening Business Improvement Districts, while ensuring they operate to high standards and are accountable to their communities. (Page 94).
- The Government is also committed to giving Local Authorities greater control over the location of local establishments to support healthier lifestyles, improved socioeconomic outcomes, and high street vitality. The Government will explore giving Local Authorities support and new discretionary tools to manage their proliferation and limit their access by vulnerable communities (Page 95-96).
- The Government will look to complement Local Authorities’ existing powers in relation to gambling outlets to refuse or place conditions on premises licences in line with measures outlined in the gambling white paper published in April 2023. (Page 96).

Culture, heritage, sport and the visitor economy

The White Paper announced that:

- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is reviewing how funding is currently allocated and delivered, alongside a review of Arts Council England

to ensure every part of the UK has the chance to access the arts and see themselves reflected in the national story. (Page 71).

- The Government will work with Mayors and Local Authorities to devolve the levers of growth in these sectors. The Government will work with Mayors and Local Authorities to ensure decisions about funding are made with them and, where possible, align with Local Growth Plans. The Government will also coproduce an ambitious, transformative National Youth Strategy that will have a particular focus on empowering young people to have a strong voice in local government and the issues that matter in their communities. This new Strategy will be published next year. (Page 71).
- Public appointments to major cultural institutions have not been representative enough. Working with Mayors and Local Authorities, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will set out further plans on this shortly. (Page 71).
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport will also review the data that it collects and publishes to ensure it provides a better picture of regional and local impact and investment. (Page 72).
- The Department and its Arm's Length Bodies will also explore the potential for deeper, collaborative partnerships with Strategic Authorities to share expertise across culture, heritage, sport, communities, and the visitor economy, opening up opportunities for joint working and alignment between organisations. (Page 72).

Health

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government is introducing a new bespoke duty in relation to health improvement and health inequalities... The Government will engage Strategic Authorities, Local Authorities and the NHS as they take this forward. (Page 79).
- The Government will therefore work with stakeholders to identify areas where alignment and closer working can be facilitated where there is a clear rationale for doing so, and where the benefits in aligning geographical boundaries significantly exceed any costs and risks incurred. (Page 79).
- To support better join-up between Strategic Authorities and Integrated Care Systems, the government expects that Mayors (or a delegate) will be appointed to one or more relevant Integrated Care Partnerships in their local area. The Government will also establish an expectation that the Mayor or a delegate is considered for the position of Chair or co-Chair of the Integrated Care Partnership, alongside Local Authority, Integrated Care Board and independent chair options. (Page 79).
- The Government will further set an expectation that Integrated Care Boards will engage with Mayors during the Integrated Care Board Chair appointment

process and will involve them in setting their priorities and developing their plans. (Page 79).

- The Government will keep under consideration the powers and levers that should be made available to Strategic Authorities to support delivery of improvements in health outcomes and maximise impact on the health and growth missions. (Page 79).

Public safety

The White Paper announced that:

Police and fire

- Where mayoral geographies align with police force and fire and rescue geographies, Mayors will be, by default, responsible for exercising Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority functions. The government is committed to increasing the number of Mayors who take on Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority responsibilities. Alignment with police and fire services boundaries will therefore be a key consideration in the negotiation of new Strategic Authorities. (Page 83).
- Where Strategic Authorities do not currently align with these boundaries, or where alignment is not appropriate for new devolution areas, the Government will take steps to ensure alignment over the longer term. (Page 83).
- The Government will also explore whether a single Mayor can take responsibility for Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority functions across two or more police forces or two or more Fire and Rescue Authorities, where this would result in coterminous boundaries, and bring forward any legislative changes as part of the English Devolution Bill. (Page 83).
- Where there is a clear case in the interests of public safety, the Government will also enable police and fire boundaries to be altered incidentally upon the transfer of Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority functions to Strategic Authority Mayors, something that will be considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure the continued efficiency and effectiveness of policing and fire functions. (Page 83).

Offender rehabilitation

- The Government will work closely with Mayors to explore how their skills, employment support, health, and housing levers can be better brought together at local level to support rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society. (Page 85).
- In the long term, the Government will explore greater alignment of probation boundaries in England with Mayoral Strategic Authorities, particularly in cases

where Mayors have taken on Police and Crime Commissioner functions. (Page 85).

Local Resilience

- The Government will support Strategic Authorities to adopt a clear role in building resilience across their areas and in working with local resilience structures. (Page 85).
- The Government will encourage close working and partnership between Strategic Authorities and the Local Resilience Forums within their areas. In July 2024, the Government announced a review of national resilience in response to the publication of the Covid Inquiry Module 1 Report, and this review will also consider recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report. The review is ongoing and will inform the development of resilience responsibilities adopted by Strategic Authorities. (Page 85).
- Depending on the outcomes of this review, the Government may amend the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to recognise Strategic Authorities as a categorised responder, meaning that they would adopt the duties and responsibilities of a member of the Local Resilience Forum. Further guidance would also be required to help Strategic Authorities undertake these duties. (Page 85).

Environment and climate change

The White Paper announced that:

- 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 8GW 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. The Government will engage closely with the North East, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, and Liverpool City Region Mayoral Combined Authorities, during the current rounds of the national schemes, to prepare and transition delivery by, at the latest, 2028. (Page 74).
- The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is moving towards a simplified, allocative approach for funding schemes, for example via Strategic Partnerships in the social housing scheme, which will pave the way for further devolution of the delivery model for the Warm Homes Plan. (Page 74).
- To give Strategic Authorities a meaningful role in planning the future energy system, the National Energy System Operator will engage with them as it develops Regional Energy Strategic Plans and provide a transparent route for local insights to inform energy system planning. (Page 75).

- The Government is committed to establishing heat network zoning in England. Zoning coordinators within Strategic Authorities will be able to designate areas as heat network zones, enabling the most appropriate level of local government to assume the role of heat network zoning coordinator and play a key role in the delivery of heat decarbonisation. (Page 75).
- The Government will begin the transition by enhancing the roles and functions of the responsible authorities for Local Nature Recovery Strategies. The Government will empower these authorities, which are already operating at county or combined authority scales, with a clear mandate to take a leadership role on Local Nature Recovery Strategies and wider environmental delivery...Over time, the Government envisages Strategic Authorities will be appointed the Local Nature Recovery Strategies responsible authority where they are not already. (Page 76).

Innovation

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will build on existing commitments to support effective innovation partnerships by empowering regional innovation decision-making through stronger direct connections with UK Research and Innovation. This will include:
 - Building on the lessons learned from the successful innovation accelerator pilots, the Government will work with Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities to develop a future regional innovation funding programme as part of the second phase of the Spending Review. This will allow local leaders to develop bespoke innovation support offers for their regions and deliver these in partnership with UK Research and Innovation, based on their capability and the maturity of their local innovation ecosystems.
 - UK Research and Innovation extending its regional partnerships and network of embedded points of contact with Mayoral Strategic Authorities that are committed to work collaboratively on innovation, ensuring they are strategically involved in the development and delivery of future strategies and investments.
 - Innovate UK collaborating with all Mayoral Strategic Authorities to produce joint plans that shape long-term innovation strategies and investments in places.
 - Publishing UK Research and Innovation data on the location of investments to help Strategic Authorities to understand publicly supported innovation activity in their region and how to best take advantage of it.
 - Establishing annual engagement between the Mayors of Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities and the Science Minister, plus more regular senior engagement with UK Research and Innovation senior leaders.

- Consulting with Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities on the development of relevant Department of Science, Industry and Technology and UK Research and Innovation strategies. (Page 69).

Data

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government will establish a new Mayoral Data Council to integrate senior data leaders from Mayoral Strategic Authorities into central decision-making on data issues that affect them. It will champion better data and better use of data, as well as improved data sharing. The Data Council will input into the Mayoral Council and the central government digital and data function. The Council will also look to collaborate with Devolved Governments where appropriate. (Page 44).
- Together with relevant government departments, the Mayoral Data Council will refine and implement the data partnership principles, which were co-developed with Greater Manchester and West Midlands Combined Authorities through the trailblazer deals. These set out how central government and Strategic Authorities will work together for the legal, safe and secure sharing of data, to make accessing data easier and more streamlined. The principles will support and streamline negotiations with individual government departments over access to priority datasets. (Page 44).
- The Government will support Office for National Statistics (ONS) to lead a refresh of the government's subnational data strategy, in which they seek to drive the delivery of better local statistics in collaboration with the Devolved Governments and draw on findings from the recent Lievesley Review. The Government will also continue to engage with the ONS in meeting the ambitions of that strategy through their local data and insight programme. (Page 45).
- To boost the data and analytical capacity of Strategic Authorities the Government will provide continued support for ONS Local to gather user needs and understand data gaps, provide data access, analytical support, and capability to local data leaders. (Page 45).
- Strategic Authorities will be consulted on the development and operation of cross-government services that enable easier data discovery and access, as stakeholders alongside central government departments. Examples of current data discovery and access initiatives include the Data Marketplace, National Data Library and the Integrated Data Service. (Page 45).
- The Government will legislate to broaden the scope of the Digital Economy Act 2017 public service delivery powers via a provision in the Data (Use and Access) Bill – to allow for information sharing to improve public service delivery to businesses. The Government will also work with Strategic Authorities to consider establishing data sharing initiatives under the Digital Economy Act. The Government will assess existing data governance practices (including information sharing agreements) and aim to streamline these processes in

compliance with the relevant Codes of Practice and data protection legislation. (Page 45).

- The Government are committed to improving the efficiency of data collection while improving data consistency and completeness through the adoption of data standards. (Page 45).
- Any and all potential options to increase access to data will, where applicable, respect the provisions in the Data Protection Act 2018, UK General Data Protection Regulation in order to achieve compliance in design, the common law duty of confidentiality and the requirement for Local Authority consent to any future data sharing arrangements. (Page 45).

Next steps

The White Paper announced that:

- The Government intends to group areas at similar stages of progress, prioritising those minded to work towards mayoral models of devolution. (Page 112).
- The Government will invite a number of places to join the Devolution Priority Programme. This will be for certain places that are able to come together under sensible geographies which meet the criteria, and where they are ready to achieve mayoral devolution at pace. This programme will aim to deliver institutions and have Mayors elected in the May 2026 elections, and provide certain places with the full backing of government to deliver to these ambitious timescales. Places will be able to further strengthen their voices and agency in deciding what is right for their areas, including accessing the new powers in the revised Devolution Framework and ultimately taking their seat at the Council of the Nations and Regions. The Government will announce the areas included in the Devolution Priority Programme in due course. (Page 112-3).
- The Government has already announced at the 2024 Autumn Budget that Mayors in West Yorkshire, the North East, Liverpool City Region, and South Yorkshire will join those in Greater Manchester and the West Midlands in being granted a full Integrated Settlement from next year. The Government will work with these areas to ensure they can access the non-statutory elements of the new Devolution Framework as soon as possible, and to support them to be ready for the passage of the additional statutory powers into law. (Page 113).
- The Government will also engage with other Mayoral Strategic Authorities looking to demonstrate they qualify for 'Established Mayoral' status to help them demonstrate they are ready. The Government has committed to update the Devolution Framework over time. The Government will also consider proposals raised with them at the Mayoral Council from existing and new Mayoral Strategic Authorities ahead of the Devolution Bill getting Royal Assent. (Page 113).

- The Government will encourage and facilitate Strategic Authorities working together with Arm's Length Bodies, third party providers and government departments where necessary in the use of their Devolution Framework functions. (Page 113).
- The Government will work with Mayors to: (Page 114).
 - Identify a set of jointly agreed shared priorities, which will guide action and collaboration in delivering their statutory requirement to develop Local Growth Plans.
 - Establish the Mayoral Data Council, bringing together data leads from across central and local government, to review and implement the data partnership principles.
 - Set up a new working group with the Greater London Authority to compare the powers and policy approaches of other global city authorities.
- The Government will target engagement with Mayors and Strategic Authorities to shape how to deliver reforms on: (Page 115).
 - New freedoms for Local and Strategic Authorities, on removing the requirements for Secretary of State consent they are required to seek on use of their powers and byelaws.
 - The areas of competence for Strategic Authorities and how these are supported by the powers to deliver against them.
 - How best to reflect devolution into policymaking, where these are appropriate for local delivery and in their areas of competency. This includes feeding back proposals, developing the ambition for public sector boundary realignment, and how to ensure Non-Departmental Public Bodies and Arm's Length Bodies build in Local Growth Plans and Spatial Development Strategies to their work.
 - The future of the Scrutiny Protocol to continue to improve the standards of scrutiny locally.
 - How to deliver external scrutiny of value for money of local public spending, particularly where freedoms and flexibilities of the Integrated Settlement are being utilised. The wider reform of audit will include consideration of how to support and provide external assurance on this.
 - Considering a single point of accountability for value for money, exploring Local Accounting Officers and Local Public Accounts Committees models to enhance the accountability of Strategic Authorities.
Considering how to ensure transparency and oversight of decision-making and activity conducted by the bodies that Strategic Authorities establish.
 - Boosting capacity support for institutions, looking at what would best support them.
 - Delivering data reform, developing a comprehensive vision for local government data.
 - Effective voting arrangements for strategic planning. (Page 114-15).

- Work with Local Authorities and the wider local government sector to:
 - Identify where more freedoms can be provided for Local Authorities to use powers without central approval.
 - Develop proposals to improve support and development for councillors, as well as addressing barriers to attracting and retaining elected members.
 - Consult on local government standards.
 - Set out a vision for radically simplifying the local audit system, including an intention to establish a new body for local audit. The Government will engage with key stakeholders on a separate document, which will set out the vision in more detail.
 - Establish a local government workforce development group, run in partnership with the sector, to identify practical solutions to workforce recruitment and retention.
 - Work with individual areas on local government reorganisation, inviting proposals from all remaining two-tier areas and those unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services to their residents. The Government will facilitate delivery of an ambitious first wave of reorganisation in this Parliament.
 - Develop further proposals for public service reform and prevention, alongside place-based leadership models. The areas of competence for Strategic Authorities and how these are supported by the powers to deliver against them.
 - Confirm effective strategic planning voting arrangements outside of Strategic Authorities.