

# English Devolution

## Statement made on 16 December 2024

Statement UIN HLWS313

### Statement made by

**Baroness Taylor of Stevenage**

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

Labour

Life peer

Lords



### Statement

My Honourable Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution (Jim McMahon OBE MP) has today made the following statement:

Today, I am pleased to announce that the Government has laid the English Devolution White Paper.

The number one mission of this government is to relight the fire of our economy and ignite growth in every region. But we have an economy that hoards potential and a politics that hoards power – England is one of the most centralised developed countries, with too many decisions affecting too many people made by too few.

To truly get growth in every corner of the country and raise living standards, as set out in the government’s ambitious Plan for Change, we must rewire England and end the hoarding in Whitehall by devolving power and money from central government to those with skin in the game.

That means empowering Mayors to drive growth and ending the patchwork approach to devolution. But it also means rebuilding and reforming local government as the foundation for devolution, a reset in the relationship between central and local government, and giving communities stronger tools to shape the future of their local areas.

To do this, we will bring forward a landmark English Devolution Bill when parliamentary time allows. In advance of the Bill, we have today laid the English Devolution White Paper.

#### Deepening and widening devolution in England

At its core, the White Paper sets out how the Government will strengthen and widen the mayoral model of devolution across England. Mayors are uniquely placed to drive growth. They can use their mandate for change to take the difficult decisions needed to drive growth; their standing and soft power to convene local partners to tackle shared problems; and their platform to tackle the obstacles to growth that need a regional approach.

To equip Mayors with the tools they need to deliver, we will:

- **Provide unprecedented powers and budgets for Mayors**, via our enhanced devolution framework. This will include:

o A clear and transparent route for Mayors to access integrated funding settlements over time. Starting with Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, Liverpool City Region, and the North East, this is a consolidated budget across housing, regeneration, local growth, local transport, skills, retrofit, and employment support.

o New powers over strategic planning and control of grant funding for regeneration and housing delivery, putting our regions at the centre of the drive to build 1.5 million homes in this Parliament.

o Devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills functions and supported employment funding to Mayors, as well as a substantive role in future employment support that is additional to core Jobcentre Plus provision. Mayors will take on joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model and will have a crucial role in ensuring there are clear pathways of progression from education into both further and higher education and local employment opportunities.

o A statutory role for Mayors in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network, with an additional right for the most established Mayors to request devolution of services, stations and infrastructure.

o A strengthened role for Mayors in relation to business support, boosting exports and attracting international investment.

o Moving Mayoral Strategic Authorities to simple majority voting, including the Mayor's vote, wherever possible, because unanimity is not in the best interests of getting houses built or growing the local economy.

- **Reform and join up public services**, to help services deliver for citizens and reduce the number of politicians. One of the simplest and most effective means to do this is bottom up, through place. So the government will: transfer Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) responsibilities to Mayors where boundaries align; explore the possibility of a single Mayor taking on PCC and FRA responsibilities across two or more authorities where this would result in coterminous boundaries; establish an expectation that Mayors are appointed to Integrated Care Partnerships and are considered for the role of Chair or Co-Chair; and announce a long-term ambition to align public service boundaries, including Job Centres, police, probation, fire, health services, and Strategic Authorities. Through these measures, Strategic Authorities will be positioned as convenors on public service reform, working in partnership with Local Authorities.
- **Hardwire devolution into government**, because, for too long, the priorities of places have been ignored. New forums, like the Prime Minister's Council of Nations and Regions, and statutory Local Growth Plans, which dovetail with the government's National Industrial Strategy, will hardwire local areas into the way the UK government operates, enabling every corner of the country to play its part in delivering the Government's Plan for Change.
- **Establish 'devolution by default'**. Devolution in England has been ad hoc and inconsistent, with it being too unclear what powers places can access, when and how. The government will legislate to set out which powers go to which type of authority. The most far-reaching and flexible powers will be for areas with Mayors, because they provide the most visible and accountable form of local leadership. This is the floor of our ambition, not the ceiling, so we will enable our most mature institutions to request and pilot new functions to drive innovation.

As we widen devolution, our goal is simple. Universal coverage of strategic authorities in England. These should be larger than individual councils, covering wider areas where people live and work, to utilise the benefits of economies of scale. Many places already have Combined Authorities that serve this role.

The government issued an invitation to places without devolution to submit proposals in July. We have had constructive conversations with a range of areas, including Cheshire and Warrington, Norfolk and Suffolk and others, about how devolution could support their ambitions.

The government will shortly set out its Priority Programme for devolution – which will be for areas that are willing to progress devolution to an accelerated timescale, and to plan for inaugural mayoral elections in May 2026. The government will continue to develop proposals for new strategic authorities collaboratively and in partnership with local areas. However, to ensure that everyone in England can benefit from devolution and ensure the effective running of public services, the government will legislate for a ministerial directive, allowing the creation of strategic authorities where absolutely necessary, and after due time has been allowed, local leaders have not been able to agree. This goes hand-in-glove with our partnership approach to local government reorganisation. Taken together, this will mean fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents.

### **Delivering devolution at every scale**

Everyone – from regional Mayors leading strategic economic policy, to frontline councillors convening their communities – needs the tools and trust to deliver change. That is why the White Paper is a vision for putting power in the right places and repairing the foundations of local government.

Councils are the foundation of our state – critical to driving growth, delivering and reforming the local public services people rely on, and to our democratic system. But local government has not been empowered to live up to its potential and people have suffered as a result. We will rebuild local government after 14 years of mismanagement and decline, so that it is fit, legal and decent. This means fairer funding and multi-year financial settlements, as we committed to in the local government finance policy statement in November. The initial consultation on the principles of this funding reform will be launched later this week. The public being able to hold councils to account for decisions means ending micromanagement from central government – so we will reform the use of wasteful competitive and ringfenced funding pots and rationalise funding for service delivery into the Local Government Finance Settlement wherever possible; streamline and rationalise reporting requirements; and review requirements for Local Authorities to seek Secretary of State consents for the use of their powers.

We will establish a genuine partnership between central and local government, recognising the vital role of local councillors as frontline community convenors, and executive members and leaders as partners in delivering the Government's missions and Plan for Change. This includes delivering 1.5m homes, with upper tier local authorities coming together to deliver strategic planning where there is not a strategic authority in place, underpinned through provisions in the forthcoming Planning and Infrastructure Bill.

And, because unitary councils can lead to better outcomes for residents, save significant money which can be reinvested in public services, and improve accountability with fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents, we will facilitate an ambitious programme of local government reorganisation. This programme will cover two-tier areas and 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 public services. Reorganisation should not delay devolution, and we will take a phased approach to delivery, including prioritising areas where reorganisation can unlock devolution.

Too many of our towns, villages and neighbourhoods have been left behind by economic change and have been let down by struggling public services. We will empower communities with new rights and levers to drive change and regenerate their neighbourhoods, and protect cherished community assets, introducing a new Community 'Right to Buy' for assets of community value. We have also retained the Long-Term Plan for Towns and will reform it into a new regeneration programme. We will enhance local authorities' powers, enabling them to address the challenges facing their areas. This will include strengthening councils' ability to take over the management of vacant residential properties and to introduce large selective licensing schemes to improve conditions in the private rented sector, without requiring Secretary of State approval.

### **Upgrading the systems**

Finally, we will secure devolution for the long-term, strengthening accountability and building capacity. We deliver improvements to the accountability system for devolution, including an outcomes framework for Integrated Funding settlements, so it remains fit for purpose as we devolve more powers and funding, and improve external scrutiny of local public spending, such as reforms to the local audit system and local government standards and oversight. To build capacity at all levels, we will ensure the right people are available for the job, seconding out from central government if needed, while ensuring Mayors are focused on their role and can empower their team to deliver.

### **Next steps**

I have engaged closely with England's regional Mayors, via our new Mayoral Council, and local authorities, via our new Leaders Council, and will continue to do so as we roll out this ambitious programme. When parliamentary time allows, we will bring forward the English Devolution Bill, which will help us deliver on the vision set out in the White Paper and on our commitment to empower communities to take back control from Westminster, so we can work in partnership to drive growth and ensure people across the whole country benefit.

## **Statement from**

**Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government**



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## Linked statements

This statement has also been made in the House of Commons

### Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government >

English Devolution



[Jim McMahon](#)

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution  
Labour, Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton

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