



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Devolution Priority Programme and Local Government Reorganisation

Initial meeting with MHCLG officials

Devolution Priority Programme



- **The Devolution Priority Programme is for areas that meet our geography criteria, as set out in the White Paper, and are ready to achieve Mayoral devolution at pace.**
- **The objective of the Programme is to establish Mayoral strategic authorities in time for May 2026 Mayoral elections.**
- **There will be full backing from government to deliver this. The Programme will streamline our usual processes, reducing burdens on councils.**



Benefits of joining the priority programme

- **Having a Mayor elected in May 2026 – the earliest possible point**
- **Having access to the Mayoral strategic authority level of the framework, as set out in the White Paper**
- **Taking seat at the Council of the Nations and the Regions, and Mayoral council, to feed into national policy making**
- **Start the clock on getting to Established status, which requires a Mayor being in place for 18 months, which if reached unlocks the single settlement**
- **Backing from government, including Ministerial support and engagement, to meet timescales for May 2026 and capacity funding to start flowing the year before your election**



Key differences in the process

- **Moving away from a 'deal-based' approach:** The new enhanced Devolution Framework will be the basis of Government's offer. We will no longer seek to agree 'deals', although we will agree text to confirm the powers available in the framework, local arrangements and confirm funding following the Spending Review. Agreements won't mark the start of the process. Crucially, the Framework is the floor, not the ceiling of our offer. As new mayoral SAs, you will have the right to request any addition to the framework moving forward once the mayoral SA is established.
- **Government-led consultations:** Instead, consultations will mark the beginning of our new process. These will be centrally-led by Government; this will minimise burdens on authorities but we will want to work closely with you to ensure they reflect the needs of your areas, and develop a consultation strategy that works for your communities.
- **Streamlined legal process – bridging the gap with the Bill:** We will use the upcoming English Devolution Bill to automatically confer the full range of functions onto the new mayoral SAs once the Bill receives Royal Assent. This will allow us to streamline the legal process and have simplified establishment orders / regulations with minimal initial functions.



December – January 2025: Engagement at officer and political level on joining the Devolution Priority Programme and confirmation that you will join the Devolution Priority Programme (note – this is not a ‘final’ decision on having a Mayor)

What is needed from you: consideration of the White Paper framework offer and agreement from all (upper-tier) Leaders to join the Devolution Priority Programme, indication on intention to join the Priority Programme by 10 January

What we will provide: political and official level conversations regarding the White Paper, Framework and Devolution Priority Programme to inform your decision

January – March 2025: Centrally-led (run by government) consultation on becoming a Mayoral strategic authority as per the framework

What is needed from you: Support in producing the consultation strategy so it reflects the needs and priorities of your area, and support in advertising it to residents and local stakeholders

What we will provide: We will draft, publish and run the consultation process, and assess the consultation responses. SoS will take a view on whether the statutory tests have been met to proceed with the necessary establishment SI

August – September 2025: Reach agreement to proceed, including Investment Fund amount following SR.

What is needed from you: Confirmation from all Local Authorities, cleared through relevant Council process, that you agree to a Mayor by May 2026 and for the necessary establishment SI.

What we will provide: Confirmation of funding, agreement publication, legal drafting of the establishment SI



Key elements of the process

September 2025 – February 2026: SIs taken through Parliament

What is needed from you: Support in the SI process, and consent to making of the SI (via delegate consent to CEx)

What we will provide: We will draft the SIs and take through Parliament

February - March 2026: Institution established

What is needed from you: Implementation of institution, such as constitution, assurance framework, appointment of statutory officers, operational readiness etc.

What we will provide: Capacity support, as set out in the White Paper

May 2026: Mayoral elections

What is needed from you: Run election, including issuing the Notice of Election

Local Government Reorganisation



Local Government Reorganisation

- **White Paper states ‘We 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.**
- **We expect all two-tier areas and smaller or failing unitaries to develop proposals for reorganisation.**
- **There will be a phased approach to delivery, taking into account where reorganisation can unlock devolution. Reorganisation should not delay devolution and plans for both should be complementary.**
- **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.**



- **We wrote to all councils in two-tier areas and small neighbouring unitaries 16 December to set out next steps; if councils want their election postponed to help them do both LGR and devo as quickly as possible – this needs to be requested by Friday 10 January.**
- **Ministers intend to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025, asking for interim plans to be submitted in March 2025.**
- **Deadline for formal proposals will be:**
 - **May 2025 for areas who want to move at pace with LGR to unlock future devolution, where council elections postponed**
 - **Autumn 2025 for areas part of the DPP, where council elections postponed**
 - **Autumn 2025 for other areas, with council elections going ahead in May 2025**
- **New unitaries will go live in April 2027 or April 2028 – this will depend on capacity, and timelines for devolution in your area**
- **For other councils where there is interest in reorganisation we are open to discussing this.**

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