



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

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As the Prime Minister set out in his speech today, strong local leadership is critical to this government's levelling up agenda. We are committed to devolving power to local places and closer to citizens, letting dynamic and accountable local leaders get on and deliver.

We have seen the benefits that strong local leadership can bring to an area, through the role that local leaders have played in championing local investment opportunities and supporting the economic recovery in their towns and cities, and in local government's excellent leadership throughout the pandemic.

We want to work with the existing combined authority mayors to ensure they have the powers they need – in exchange for strong local accountability – to deliver, to trial innovative approaches, to support the recovery, create jobs, improve local services and to level up. As we develop the white paper we will engage with them further, building on previous conversations. We also want more places, particularly in our city regions and major urban areas, to agree an ambitious Mayoral devolution deal where there is local support and continue discussions on Mayoral deals within those areas that are interested.

We promised in our manifesto to deliver full devolution in England, and we are eager to work with you to deliver this. We believe this can be achieved in different ways and with freedom of choice, and flexibility on the part of central government, and tailored to suit the needs, identity and history of local areas. We want to widen devolution beyond the cities and provide strong local leadership for all of our places; building on our work at the local level on high streets, towns and local infrastructure with a longer-term offer across larger, strategic geographies to improve their economic, social and environmental wellbeing, improve public services and drive levelling up in these areas. Counties, towns and villages are an essential part of the nation and should neither be excluded from the devolution enjoyed by many cities and suburbs, nor forced to wear a model which can seem ill-fitting.

We will be engaging with councils over the course of the Summer, beginning with a webinar in the next couple of weeks with council leaders, in advance of the Levelling Up White Paper.

While we are keen to work with local areas on what will be most suitable for them, County Deals will be guided by some key principles:

- Strong local leadership will be fundamental. Whilst high-profile, directly elected individual leaders can provide a single point of accountability to local citizens and can act as a champion for their area, we will consider other governance proposals that increase stability and strengthen local leadership.
- County devolution should operate across a sensible economic geography of a suitable scale and one based on local identity, bringing local partners together and with powers exercised at the right level to make a difference for local communities. We will be looking to do county devolution for example with the county council and its nearby unitaries, working with its districts as appropriate; or with the county council and its districts; geographically large unitary authorities, or a combination of say two such authorities where there is a recognisable single identity.
- The nature and appropriateness of proposed governance structures will impact on the nature of the deal and the types of powers and flexibilities provided in a deal. We will expect demonstrable improvements in governance, efficiency and local service join-up as part of the deal that support the delivery of levelling up.
- We expect deals to include significant reform proposals, including ways to achieve greater financial efficiency, administrative streamlining and / or more joined up services in an area. This does not mean local government (unitary) reorganisation is a prerequisite to participation – although that remains a locally-led option available where there is strong local support.

We would encourage you to begin to think amongst local partners about a vision for what you want to achieve in your place and how you can work with Government to deliver on your local priorities. We are interested to hear from you about what specific powers and flexibilities might be helpful to allow you to deliver rather than simply additional funding asks.

Those areas with the clearest, most innovative and readily deliverable proposals that support levelling up will be prioritised. At this stage, this is not a call to commission consultants, or draw up extensive proposals either for new deals or further powers. We would strongly discourage the use of costly external advisers, and councils should not be hiring lobbyists.

We will want to discuss the parameters with you further, first at the webinar and as we develop the Levelling Up White Paper. We will set out further details on the engagement process in the coming weeks.

I hope you will welcome this approach, which is guided by the Prime Minister's and my desire to empower and enhance strong local leadership and to reflect the great variety of places across England providing devolution and localism that is at ease with each part of the nation.



RT HON ROBERT JENRICK MP