



The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026

Overview of Act & RI Forum (DEFRA)

May 2026



Status and Government's aims

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act is now law, having passed through Parliament and receiving **Royal Assent on 29 April 2026**.

The Act empowers Government to fulfil the ambitions outlined in the English Devolution White Paper, 16 December 2024:

That **all of England to has a devolved administration**, with the powers to unlock an areas potential and drive growth; and

To **deliver local government reorganisation** – with the establishment of unitary authorities across England in place of existing county and district councils.

The Act supports the Government's **Plan for Change** by delivering **Strong Foundations** and **Kick Strating Economic Growth**



High-level overview

The Act covers **three broad areas**:

Devolution – it describes devolution structures, outlining and expanding powers for Mayors and devolved institutions through the new Devolution Framework and explains routes for devolution for places which don't have it.

Local Government – establishing the process for local government reorganisation, outlining changes to local authority governance reforming accountability and introducing effective neighbourhood governance structures.

Communities – empowers communities to purchase assets of community value and making reforms to commercial leases.

Effectively, the Act **standardises how local government is structured and operates in England.**



Structure of the Act

The Act consists of **6 Parts** and has **37 Schedules**.

Parts 1 & 2: deals with the creation, governance and functions of strategic authorities. They constitute the majority of the Act.

Part 3: Other measures about local authorities, such as: Local Government Re-organisation; community right to buy; land disposal; taxi licensing etc.

Part 4: deals with the establishment and running of the Local Audit Office for local government.

Part 5: deals with rent reviews and arrangements for new tenancies.

Part 6: describes the Act, it's commencement, extent and how the Act operates etc.

Act makes insertions into the existing local government legislation.

As a result, a lot of the detail on functions is detailed in the Schedules of the Act. It is **important to read the schedules along with the amended primary legislation.**



Strategic Authorities

Strategic Authorities (SA) is a new category of local government organisation.

SAs sit across significant large geography with an economic footprint, delivering regional programmes of work such as integrated transport

Made up of:

- **Combined Authorities** i.e. Greater Manchester; York and North Yorkshire;
- **Combined County Authorities** i.e. Devon and Torbay; the East Midlands;
- **The Greater London Authority;** and
- at **special dispensation** from the Secretary of State, **unitary authorities.**

Tiers of SA:

Foundation Strategic Authority:

Consists of non-mayoral combined and combined county authorities i.e. Lancashire. Includes Signal Foundation SAs where required.

Mayoral Strategic Authority: Consists of mayoral strategic authorities i.e. Tees Valley; Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

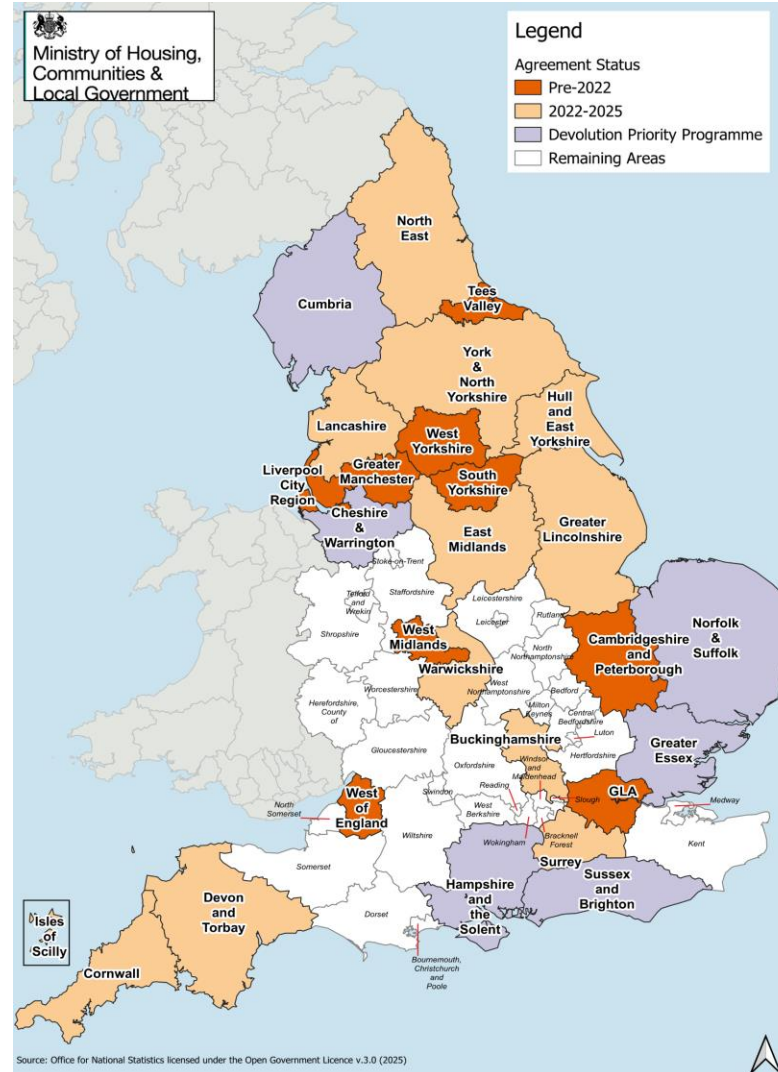
Established Mayoral Strategic Authority: The Greater London Authority and Mayoral Strategic Authorities which have existed for a period of time and has a track record of delivery.

Greater devolved powers



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Strategic Authority & Devolution Deal Geographies





Areas of Competence

Areas of Competence

- Transport and local infrastructure
- Skills and employment support
- Housing and strategic planning
- Economic development and regeneration
- The environment and climate change
- Health, well-being and public service reform
- Public safety
- Culture
- Rural affairs and coastal communities

The Act establishes a “**devolution framework**” these are the list of functions that strategic authorities have.

The “**areas of competence**” are the headings of the framework. They set the policy areas under which the functions sit.

Importantly the **areas of competence do not empower a strategic authority to do whatever they want.** The authority must have been conferred with a function to act in the area.

There are **nine areas**. The policy themes of the areas of competence have been selected because they cover issues which are impacting communities and regions.



General Powers

The Act confers on all Strategic Authorities (and also National Park Authorities, inc. the Broads Authority) the **General Power of Competence**.

The General Power of Competence is a broad enabling power which allows an authority to operate as an “individual”. It is a power that has been held by Local Authorities since 2011 and had been conferred on some Combined Authorities prior to the 2026 Act.

The Act provides Mayors of Strategic Authorities with certain General Powers as well. These include:

- **Appointment of Commissioners** – Mayors may appoint up to 10 individuals to oversee functions and delivery of works related to the nine Areas of Competence.
- **The Right to Request** – Mayors of EMSAs may request the additional conferral of functions on to SAs.
- **Power to Convene Meetings with Local Partners** – Mayors are empowered to invite “Local Partners” to a meeting to discuss matters relating to their areas of competence. “Local Partners” have a duty to respond.
- **Duty for Mayors to Collaborate** – Provides neighbouring Mayors with a formal mechanism to collaborate on matters relating to the areas of competence.
- **Mayoral Precept** – Mayors may issue a precept to deliver programmes of work.



Devolution Framework

The Act standardises the functions held by Strategic Authorities – previously functions were conferred via agreed devolution deals agreed locally with the Government of the day. This created a mismatch of powers.

Transport and Local infrastructure	Skills and Employment Support	Housing and Strategic Planning	Economic Growth and Regeneration
Strategic Authorities become the Local Transport Authority, with responsibility for planning, managing and overseeing local transport networks (e.g. buses, trams). They must produce a Local Transport Plan, which constituent councils are expected to implement. They can raise a transport levy from constituent councils and issue grants to fund delivery. They have a coordination role over local roads, including entering agreements for road maintenance and improvements. In mayoral areas, additional powers include: • Creating a Key Route Network and directing council actions on it • Setting traffic reduction targets • Approving lane rental schemes and regulating micromobility (e.g. bike hire) • Applying for traffic enforcement powers (e.g. penalty charge notices).	Functions for adult education are devolved, including control of the Adult Skills Fund (ASF). Strategic Authorities must ensure access to funded education for eligible learners, including statutory entitlements (e.g. English, maths, first qualifications). Funding is largely non-ringfenced, giving discretion to tailor provision to local labour market needs. These functions automatically transfer to new Strategic Authorities as they are created.	Mayors gain powers to intervene in planning decisions, including: • Calling in applications • Directing refusal of strategically important schemes Strategic Authorities must produce a Spatial Development Strategy (SDS) setting out long-term development priorities. Mayors can: • Create Mayoral Development Orders (granting planning permission directly) • Levy a Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to fund infrastructure • Designate Mayoral Development Areas and establish Development Corporations to deliver regeneration.	Mayoral Strategic Authorities must produce a Local Growth Plan, including: • An economic overview • Joint priorities with Government • An investment pipeline Certain public bodies must “have regard” to these priorities, shaping wider public investment decisions. Strategic Authorities must work with Local Government Pension Schemes (LGPS) to channel investment into local growth projects.



Devolution Framework

Environment and Climate Change	Health, Wellbeing, and Public Service Reform	Public Safety	Culture	Rural Affairs & Coastal Communities
No new statutory environmental powers are directly devolved through the Act. Strategic Authorities are though expected to provide local leadership on climate and environment, including biodiversity and net zero transition. The framework enables future devolution of environmental powers via secondary legislation.	Strategic Authorities are under a legal duty to have regard to improving health and reducing health inequalities when exercising their functions. This requires them to consider health impacts across all policy areas (e.g. housing, transport, skills). The duty strengthens their role as system leaders working with NHS and public service partners	Mayors can exercise Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) functions where boundaries align. Mayors can oversee multiple police force areas, with a requirement to appoint a Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime for each. The Act allows alignment of police and fire boundaries to support integration. Where geographies do not align, these powers do not transfer to the Mayor.	Strategic Authorities gain powers to support tourism and cultural activity, with powers to: - Promote tourism and cultural activity - Provide facilities to support events	Rural and coastal issues are defined as an area of competence, enabling Strategic Authorities to act where powers exist. The Act does not confer specific new powers in this area. It creates a legal basis for future devolution of targeted powers to address rural and coastal challenges.



Supporting Resources

Devolution Framework Explainer: [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill: Devolution Framework Explainers - GOV.UK](#) (summarises the various functions held by Strategic Authorities)

Guide to the Act: [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill: Guidance - GOV.UK](#) (the guide describes in high-level terms what the Act does and the various functions and responsibilities it places on strategic authorities)

Explanatory Notes: [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026](#) (non-technical notes which explain the purpose and scope of the Acts sections and schedules)

