

Aspirations for the English Devolution Bill – July 2025

A note from Sir David Lidington and Prof John Denham

The forthcoming English Devolution is an opportunity to embed a lasting devolution settlement for England that can become a settled feature of England's governance. We believe that a clear statutory basis for devolved powers is essential and published [our own proposals](#) last year under the auspices of the cross-party Constitution Reform Group.

This note summarises the provisions that we will be hoping to see in the English Devolution Bill, either on publication or after its passage through Parliament.¹ Taken together, the promise of legislation and ministerial commitments made to date come close to creating a tier of devolved local government. However, some policy commitments will remain dependent on the continuing commitment of ministers and governments which may change in the years ahead unless they are placed on a statutory basis.

There are six key areas where statutory provision should underpin government policy and create a genuinely embedded level of devolved governance. These are derived from the proposals outlined by John Denham and David Lidington under the auspices of the cross-party CRG and which have been developed through engagement with many policy groups.

1. Creating Strategic Authorities under primary legislation.

Creating Strategic Authorities under primary legislation instead of the statutory instruments used for individual combined authorities would create a consistent statutory layer of devolved government that will cover all of England. The parliamentary hurdles for abolishing or undermining Strategic Authorities would be raised considerably, ensuring that they would become an entrenched part of devolved English governance,

2. Making the Mayoral Council a statutory body.

The current Mayoral Council is a creation of, and meets, at the invitation of the UK Government and is a non-statutory body with no formal powers. As such it will remain vulnerable to changing ministerial priorities. A statutory body representing Mayors (and through them Strategic Authorities and their member authorities) would help ensure a continuing collaborative relationship between centre and local. It would provide a national forum for the development of the devolution framework and its operation; enable collective discussion of funding issues; encourage the sharing of best practice and policy between Strategic Authorities without requiring Whitehall intervention; and allow collective oversight of new audit and scrutiny arrangements.

¹ We are grateful to many colleagues in central and local government, think tanks and academics who have helped shape our thinking. However, these proposals remain our responsibility.

3. Creating a legal framework for the devolution framework.

Commitments made in the English Devolution White Paper on the devolution framework should be placed on a statutory basis. This should include: the competences and devolved powers available to different levels of Strategic Authority; the right to request additional powers (which should be available to both individual and groups of mayors); the conditions under which powers might be refused or new powers added to the devolution framework for all areas; and ensuring that new powers that, once agreed, could not be removed from the framework or from individual SAs. The right to request new powers should extend to the functions of NDPBs and ALBs.

4. Enabling Strategic Authorities to pool powers at a wider regional level.

The need for a regional tier of activity has been acknowledged by ministers. While these might often develop in collaboration with central government, it is also important that Strategic Authorities can pool powers with one or more neighbouring Strategic Authorities. This might enable, for example, joint 'cross border' strategic planning, the more effective use of housing and infrastructure investment, the creation of joint development companies, and the effective alignment of Local Growth Plans. SAs should be able to do this without risk of legal, regulatory or political challenge or of inconsistent decisions by government agencies. The Bill should make it clear what activities would be covered by current proposals for a power of competence, but it is likely that specific provision would be needed in areas such as joint spatial plans.

5. Creating Local Public Accounts Committees.

Robust local scrutiny in areas covered by Mayoral Strategic Authorities is essential to ensure effectively accountability and to reduce the dependence on upwards accountability to central government. In parallel, Strategic Authority Chief Executives would assume Local Accounting Officer Responsibilities for devolved spending, reporting to the NAO. Local Public Accounts Committees should scrutinise the activities of Mayors and Strategic Authorities and the wider use of public monies by all services across the Strategic Authorities area. LPACs should be professionally supported through the new Audit Service. The Bill should provide the legal framework to enable the development of LPACs and LAOs.

6. Creating a statutory duty for local devolution and empowerment

Enhanced devolution to and collaboration within Mayoral Strategic Authorities should be complemented by enabling the exercise of local authority and mayoral strategic responsibilities at more local level where possible and appropriate. While community empowerment will be the focus of a future government policy paper, the English Devolution Bill should place a duty on local and strategic authorities to set out community empowerment plans that would set out how their own responsibilities might be devolved to or shared with local communities.