

What is devolution and how does it affect me?

NAVCA and ACRE have produced this resource as part of a project supporting the VCFSE sector and forming unitary and strategic authorities to work together through devolution and local government reorganisation.

This round of devolution represents the 'the biggest transfer of power out of Westminster to England's regions this century.'^[1]

Devolution will create opportunities for VCFSE organisations including building new relationships and partnerships, access to new sources of funding, ability to reshape public services and more local commissioning. There are also some significant challenges such as working over different and larger geographical areas and risks of loss of funding as grants and contracts are restructured.

Read on to find out more.

Devolution proposals

The English Devolution White Paper outlined the Government's intentions to have all of England covered by new devolved Strategic Authorities by the end of this Parliament in June 2029. In areas that are not currently covered by existing combined authorities, top tier councils (i.e. county councils, metropolitan boroughs and unitary authorities) will be invited to work together to develop proposals for new Strategic Authorities.

The Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) is fast tracking devolution for six areas:

- Cumbria: Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness
- Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Warrington
- Greater Essex including Thurrock and Southend
- Hampshire and the Solent, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton
- Norfolk and Suffolk,
- East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton.

[1] English Devolution White Paper (2024) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

What is devolution and how does it affect me?

These areas will see the establishment of new devolved authorities from April 2026 and the election of Mayors for two of the areas in May 2027 (Cumbria, East and West Cheshire and Warrington) and for the remaining four in May 2028 (Greater Essex, Hampshire and the Solent, Norfolk and Suffolk, East and West Sussex and Brighton).

Other areas of England not already covered by a devolved authority (they might be called a combined authority or a combined county authority) have until 20 March 2026 to make proposals to Government on sensible future geographies for devolution.

The Government wants more than one local authority to come together over a large geography, with a total population in the sub-region of around 1.5 million people.

What will new strategic authorities do?

Local leaders will have increased powers over areas of policy such as local growth, housing and planning, transport, and employment support and skills, supported by direct, long term, flexible funding, with the aim to create solutions that meet the needs of the area as a whole.

Strategic authorities and directly elected mayors will have a mandate to drive growth and reshape public services. They will have responsibility over seven areas of competence, although not all responsibilities will be transferred to new strategic authorities at once.

The seven areas of competence are:

1. Transport and local infrastructure
2. Skills and employment support
3. Housing and strategic planning
4. Economic development and regeneration
5. Environment and climate change
6. Health, wellbeing and public service reform
7. Public safety.

Eventually, the new mayors will also have responsibility for police forces and fire and rescue services.

[1] English Devolution White Paper (2024) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

What is devolution and how does it affect me?

The areas of competence that will be devolved to strategic authorities are designed to bolster, not detract from, the functions and role of other public bodies, such as NHS England, Jobcentre Plus, the Environment Agency or local councils. To enable effective working with the public, private and voluntary sectors, wide-ranging legal powers will be given to Strategic Authorities to deliver in their areas of competence. Government will also explore enabling Mayors to promote economic, social, and environmental aims and convene stakeholders, with a corresponding duty on public authorities to respond. It would go hand in hand with a duty to collaborate with constituent local authorities and neighbouring Strategic Authorities in delivering these areas of competence. These changes will put Mayors in charge of their place and give them a mandate to get things done.

Are there different types of strategic authorities?

Yes – there are three types, two types will also have a directly elected mayor. All existing combined authorities or county combined authorities will legally become a Strategic Authority once the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill becomes law.

1. **Foundation Strategic Authorities** described as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor. This type of strategic authority will have fewer powers over policy and finance than those with directly elected mayors.
2. **Mayoral Strategic Authorities** will be the existing combined or county combined authorities and will have some of the areas of competence transferred to them in the first phases of work, with further added later. This includes East Midlands, Hull and East Yorkshire, Greater Lincolnshire which formed in April 2024. Where new devolved areas have opted to have a directly elected mayor, they will be Mayoral Strategic Authorities.
3. Those who meet specified eligibility criteria may be designated as **Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities**. This unlocks further devolution, most notably an integrated finance settlement and full powers across all seven areas of competence. So far seven existing devolved authorities have received Established Mayoral Strategic Authority status: Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Greater London, Liverpool City Region, North East, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire.

What is devolution and how does it affect me?

Why does this matter to my organisation?

1. There will be new decision-makers and new structures to get to know and work with over a larger geographical area, potentially including decisions about policy areas that directly affect what your organisation does.
2. Decisions will no longer be taken nationally on some policy areas but decided over a more local area, which you now have a chance to proactively inform and influence, particularly on how money is spent and what the priorities might be.
3. There is potential for more locally tailored commissioning with locally designed services and new commissioning models that favour collaboration, innovation and local providers.
4. VCFSE organisations may be well-placed to influence strategic priorities and shape service redesign, especially in areas such as early intervention and prevention, community safety, employment and skills support, and health inequalities.
5. To enable effective working with the public, private and voluntary sectors, wide-ranging legal powers will be given to Strategic Authorities to deliver in the areas of competence. Mayors will also have the power to convene stakeholders with a corresponding duty on the public sector to respond. This means more formal opportunities to collaborate with statutory partners and strengthen influence. For some VCFSE organisations this will require capacity building to engage effectively - work with your local NAVCA or ACRE member to do this well.
6. The funding your VCFSE organisation receives from grants or contracts may move away from your local council to the new strategic authority with the risk of new approaches to commissioning and greater competition. This will also create new opportunities to provide activities and services for your beneficiaries and communities, with new sources of funding available.
7. VCFSE organisations will need to understand their local Strategic Authority's priorities and decision-making processes to secure resources and demonstrate how they can be effective partners and collaborators.

You can read more about the Devolution Priority Programme from the [Institute for Government](#).