

Levelling up the UK white paper: summary

Key highlights

- A review of neighbourhood governance, including looking at the role and functions of parish councils and how to make them quicker and easier to establish.
- Explore how the existing Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) can be used to support neighbourhood and community activity where parish councils do not exist and continue the neighbourhood portion of CIL as it introduces a new Infrastructure Levy.
- No top-down restructuring of local government.
- A new Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships.
- Enhance the offer in the Community Ownership Fund, learning lessons from the first bidding round to maximise the impact of the fund.
- Consider how the existing Community Asset Transfer and Asset of Community Value Schemes can be enhanced.
- Councils and communities will create new local design codes to shape streets as residents wish, widen the accessibility of neighbourhood planning, encouraging more accessible hybrid models for planning committees in England and look to pilot greater empowerment of communities to shape regeneration and development plans.
- The ability to have a meaningful say on individual planning applications will be retained and improved through new digital technologies.
- Work to build local government capacity and capability through ongoing sector support and funding a programme of improvement covering a range of priorities which is reviewed periodically.
- Extend centrally designed training, advice and guidance, and market and supplier intelligence to the sector.
- Introduce an obligation for the UK Government to publish an annual report on delivery against the levelling up missions
- A new approach to place through Levelling Up Directors, providing a key point of contact for local areas, acting as a bridge between local leaders and central government.
- Setting up local panels, drawn from a wide range of stakeholders, to serve as a sounding board on levelling up delivery and implementation, working closely with new Levelling Up Directors.
- Engage with local government and key stakeholders on the simplification of the local growth funding landscape with respect to the publication of further plans later this year.
- Explore piloting local votes for funding, putting choices in the hands of local communities to let them decide what matters most.
- Launch the UK Shared Prosperity Fund providing funding of £2.6 billion by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition.
- Establish a body to focus on local data, transparency and outcomes.

Overview

- The [Levelling up the United Kingdom \(UK\) white paper](#) was published on 2 February 2022 and sets out how the UK Government will spread opportunity more equally across the UK.

- It covers the scale and causes of geographic disparities across the country, as well as a programme of change grounded in twelve missions, improved central and local decision making through better information, incentives and institutions, and rigorous and independent monitoring and evaluation.
- Its programme of change has four pillars with aims to:
 - help ensure everyone, wherever they live, has the opportunity to succeed and thrive
 - ensure that businesses can invest, create jobs and drive productivity, particularly in areas that have previously struggled
 - empower local leaders and communities
 - enable people to take pride in the places they live and have a good quality of life.
- It is a critical stepping stone on the UK Government's ambition to radically alter spatial disparities, ensuring that geography is no longer destiny and that all people and places in the UK are equipped to share in the country's substantial economic, social and cultural wealth.

NALC's initial response

In NALC's on the day response to the white paper, our chair, Cllr Keith Stevens, said:

- *"Today's white paper is a welcome and positive first step down the long road ahead to levelling up, further devolution and empowering local communities.*
- *The government has rightly recognised the local leadership role of England's 10,000 local (parish and town) councils. They are the first tier of local government in England, closest to the people, and play an essential part in improving and strengthening communities. But they have the potential to do so much more. That is why I strongly welcome the review of their role and functions and make it quicker and easier to set them up.*
- *In England, local councils are already putting pride in place through the provision of parks and open spaces, markets, support for high streets and town centres, and so much more, and taking action on other local priorities.*
- *This review provides an opportunity to strengthen our first tier of local government and ensure their 100,000 councillors have the necessary powers, support, and direct access to existing funding to provide high-quality local facilities and services and further improve people's sense of belonging and community.*
- *Given the main areas for investment by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, its design must give local councils direct access to this funding to tackle locally identified priorities.*
- *I also welcome the government's commitment to publish the second report on rural proofing in England this spring. Levelling up must also include levelling out and ensuring rural communities are not ignored.*
- *Measures to strengthen local leadership must also extend to all levels and not be confined to just county or regional level, which are still far removed from people's everyday lives and experiences. This should include greater recognition of the support needed for the 100,000 local councillors who provide local leadership every day in their communities.*
- *Local councils must also not be overlooked by new structures such as the levelling up directors and advisory council or independent bodies set up to strengthen the transparency of local government.*
- *I look forward to discussing the white paper in more detail with the government and working together to maximise the potential of local councils to levelling up our nation and communities."*

Measures of particular relevance or interest to local councils are below.

Community empowerment and review of neighbourhood governance

- The UK Government will begin work with partners in local government and civil society on a programme to put in place a bold new approach to community empowerment.
- This includes launching a review of neighbourhood governance in England, looking at how to make it easier for local people and community groups to come together, set local priorities and shape the future of their neighbourhoods.
- The review will also look at the role and functions of parish councils in England and how to make them quicker and easier to establish.
- The UK Government will also pilot new models for community partnership that can help make local power a reality. These will empower local people to shape the place they live, influence local services and take control of community spaces.
- One model the UK Government will test is Community Covenants. These would be agreements between councils, public bodies and the communities they serve, seeking to harness the energy, know-how and assets of local communities.
- Communities also need strong community infrastructure and social capital, but this is lacking in many places and tends to be particularly weak in the most deprived places.
- The UK Government will set out a new Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships. The strategy will be underpinned by the following guiding principles:
 - community power – making it easier for local people and community groups to come together to set local priorities and shape their neighbourhoods
 - understanding “what works” – building the evidence base to better understand how to support communities and put them in the driving seat to level up
 - listening to communities – engaging with communities, local government and civil society to identify priorities, the assets that matter to local places, and the policies and actions needed to strengthen community infrastructure
 - every community matters – reaching out to engage with the most disconnected communities, and ensuring funding reaches those most in need. This will be matched by a better understanding of the facts and figures behind community activity.
- The UK Government will work with partners to bring together economic data on the value of civil society, working with the ONS to develop a civil society satellite account, so that estimates more fully reflect the scope of the sector and fill a longstanding gap in official statistics.
- In order to deliver substantive and sustainable change, local places need the power to create and deliver solutions to local challenges. This is not only about transferring power from central to local government.
- Power is also generated locally, by the voluntary collaboration of citizens and public servants taking responsibility for realising the changes they want to see.
- One model the UK Government will test is Community Covenants. These would be agreements between councils, public bodies and the communities they serve, seeking to harness the energy, know-how and assets of local communities. They would also set out how local social capital and infrastructure can be built and sustained to encourage confident and active communities.
- A Covenant approach would see local authorities and communities work together to take a holistic look at the health of local civic and community life, set out a driving ambition for their area, and share power and resources to achieve this. The UK Government will now begin testing with partners in local government and civil society to design an approach to community partnership.
- Alongside this, local people will also be given a greater role in decision making and delivery in their area.
- The UK Government will make the following commitments to empower local communities.

- Assets: The UK Government will enhance the offer in the Community Ownership Fund, learning lessons from the first bidding round to maximise the impact of the fund across the UK. As part of the strategy for community spaces and relationships, the UK Government will consider how the existing Community Asset Transfer and Asset of Community Value Schemes can be enhanced, and consult on options to go further to support community ownership.
 - Planning: Councils and communities will create new local design codes to shape streets as residents wish; widen the accessibility of neighbourhood planning, encouraging more accessible hybrid models for planning committees in England; and look to pilot greater empowerment of communities to shape regeneration and development plans. The ability to have a meaningful say on individual planning applications will be retained and improved through new digital technologies.
 - Social economy: The UK Government will consider how best to encourage social organisations and entrepreneurship to flourish in left-behind places across the UK, building on and augmenting existing support, generating evidence on what social enterprises need to do to thrive in disadvantaged places, and encouraging the next generation of social entrepreneurs
 - Procurement: As part of the UK Government's plans to reform the way the public sector procures services it will improve transparency, provide greater flexibility and put greater emphasis on social value. New reforms will include awarding contracts on the basis of Most Advantageous Tender, encouraging a greater consideration of social value across the c.£300bn of public procurement contracts.
- The UK Government will explore piloting local votes for funding, putting choices in the hands of local communities to let them decide what matters most.
 - Alongside this, new sources of funding will be made available for community activity.
 - The UK Government will help charities, social enterprises and vulnerable individuals, by unlocking £44m through the Dormant Assets Scheme. This includes:
 - £20m through the Youth Futures Foundation to help break down barriers and improve accessibility into employment for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds
 - £20m to Access – The Foundation for Social Investment – which will provide urgently-needed finance to over 1,000 charities and social enterprises, particularly in more deprived areas in England
 - £4m to Fair4All Finance to accelerate their work on affordable consolidation loans for people in financially vulnerable circumstances.
 - The UK Government will launch a public consultation in 2022 to invite input on what social or environmental purposes the English portion of the Dormant Assets Scheme should fund. This will include options on youth, financial inclusion and social investment, as well as considering a new Community Wealth Fund proposal to distribute funding to local communities.
 - In addition, the UK Government will:
 - provide community investment as part of the £2.6bn UKSPF, including new investment opportunities in community-led activity. The UK Government will support places in every corner of the UK to combine strategic investments with community and neighbourhood activity, including in the places where social capital is weakest.
 - explore further collaboration between lottery funders for arts, heritage, sport and community projects within the UK to ensure that £1.7bn in National Lottery funding every year reaches the people and places that need it most.
 - explore how the existing Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) can be used to support neighbourhood and community activity where Parish Councils do not exist across England and continue the neighbourhood portion of CIL as it introduces a new Infrastructure Levy.

- consider ways to further develop the role of government in leveraging private investment into community and neighbourhood infrastructure, community activity and wealth building, which will include building on and extending the evidence base for de-risking interventions, as well as exploring new opportunities for working with the financial sector to test and scale innovative approaches.

Local government reorganisation

- The UK Government will not impose top-down restructuring of local government.
- Local government reorganisation can help to simplify the patchwork of local government structures, creating institutions with strong and accountable leadership over an optimal geography for delivering high quality public services.
- While there is a case for wholesale institutional reform, this could distract from the implementation of improved local government services and outcomes, and delay the agreement and implementation of devolution deals.
- Reorganisation will remain a locally-led avenue available where there is broad local support, but will not be a requirement for a devolution deal.
- The UK Government intends to follow an incremental approach, using existing legislation to work with areas which are seeking to establish reformed local governance structures.

Supporting local leaders and the local government sector

- Stronger local leadership is essential to raise living standards, improve public services, and increase people's pride in place. This goes beyond elected councillors and mayors, to include the broader public, private and voluntary sectors.
- As new powers are devolved, the UK Government will provide support to build local capacity and capability.
- The UK Government will empower local leaders with the resources they need to level up their communities. This means a commitment to ensuring that funding allocations for councils are based on an up-to-date assessment of their needs and resources.
- The data used to assess this has not been updated in a number of years, with some dating back as far as 2000. Over the coming months, the UK Government will work closely with the sector and other stakeholders to update this and to look at the challenges and opportunities facing the local government sector before consulting on any potential changes.
- The UK Government will also work to build local government capacity and capability through ongoing sector support and has funded a programme of improvement covering a range of priorities. This is reviewed periodically. Strengthening the sector's commercial and procurement capacity and capability will also be a key focus of this review.
- The UK Government will extend centrally designed training, advice and guidance, and market and supplier intelligence to the sector. This will enable local authorities to make sound commercial decisions, achieve savings and service improvements, and support commercial delivery that represents best value to citizens.

Supporting private sector partnerships

- The UK Government is encouraging the integration of LEPs and their business boards into MCAs, the GLA and County Deals, where these exist.
- Where a devolution deal does not yet exist, LEPs will continue to play their vital role in supporting local businesses and the local economy.
- Where devolution deals cover part of a LEP, this will be looked at on a case by case basis.
- Further detail on this transition will be provided in writing to LEPs as soon as possible.

Transparency and accountability

- The cornerstone of a credible policy regime is the combination of well-defined policy goals and policies, alongside mechanisms to ensure that decision-makers are held to account transparently for the choices they make and whether objectives are being met.
- The UK Government is putting in place a new accountability regime for the design and delivery of levelling up.
- First, a statutory obligation to report annually on progress towards meeting the Levelling Up missions. The report will draw on the metrics set out in this White Paper and provide rigorous analysis and monitoring of progress in reducing regional disparities. It will also provide progress updates on policy related to addressing spatial differences in living standards and social outcomes across the UK. This annual report will be published and be subject to external and Parliamentary scrutiny.
- Second, to bring a diverse, independent and expert group of voices into the policymaking process, the UK Government is creating a Levelling Up Advisory Council. The Council will be charged with providing independent expert advice on matters relating to the design and delivery of levelling up. Its analysis will be commissioned and published, at the discretion of the Levelling Up Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, working with other ministers. The Council will consider a range of themes relevant to the levelling up challenge articulated in this White Paper.

High street rejuvenation

- The UK Government announced the next 68 local authorities to receive expert support from the High Streets Task Force, allocated using the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), together with a measure of retail exposure.
- Delivery to these local authorities will be staggered, starting from summer 2022 until the end of the programme in 2024. This builds on the Task Force's wider offer to all communities, which includes online resources and training modules, webinars and access to data dashboards.
- In addition, the UK Government will bring forward further measures to make high streets and town centres the thriving hearts of communities again.

Green Space

- The UK Government plans to empower local leaders and communities to reimagine their urban green space and improve access for communities who lack it. This includes enhancing and maintaining protection of the Green Belt.
- The UK Government will develop plans for: further greening the Green Belt in England; bringing wildlife back, aimed at increasing public access while simultaneously delivering nature recovery; securing further environmental improvements.
- A wider rethinking of urban green space, including considering new ownership and management models and locally-determined access targets to improve access to the outdoors in towns and cities across the UK.
- The UK Government will also radically expand investment in parks. Access to safe, attractive communal green spaces is critical to enhancing the attractiveness of towns and cities. Alongside the existing £9m UK-wide Levelling Up Parks Fund which provides direct grants to deliver over 100 green spaces in the communities with the lowest access, a new £30m parks fund will deliver up to £1m to at least 30 local parks in England for

- The UK Government will also invest over £750m in this Parliament on tree planting and peatland restoration in England, helping to increase tree planting rates across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by the end of this Parliament and support the creation of new community forests in the North East, Cumbria and Plymouth to improve access to woodlands where these are needed most.

Supporting young people

- The UK Government will invest £560m of funding over the next three years to deliver a new National Youth Guarantee that reflects young people’s priorities, with a focus on levelling up.
- This will ensure that, by 2025, every young person in England will have access to regular out of school activities, adventures away from home and opportunities to volunteer, supported by:
 - investing £288m of capital to deliver up to 300 new and refurbished youth facilities, ranging from small modular buildings to flagship youth zone projects, which will be supported by revenue funding to give young people access to support from youth workers, creating over 45,000 extra youth activities per year
 - funding a reformed National Citizen Service programme for the next three years, with a year-round offer for thousands of young people
 - providing £4m to the #iwill fund to create thousands of new youth volunteering opportunities.
- An additional £10m will be spent this year in areas in need of levelling up, this will enable local youth providers to invest in capital projects that expand the reach, number and range of services they currently offer.

Culture, Heritage and Sport

- Tackling disparities in access to culture and delivering a truly national cultural offer should be a defining feature of levelling up. The UK Government will make changes to transform the landscape for arts, culture and heritage by significantly increasing cultural investment outside London.
- In the spring, DCMS will set out further plans over the next three years and beyond, this will include:
 - £40m of successful projects in England as part of the Cultural Investment Fund, with the majority of this being spent outside of London on over 50 projects involving cultural assets, libraries, museums and creative industries
 - Identifying over 100 levelling up priority places outside of London that will be the focus for additional ACE engagement and investment.
 - This will mean that places like Stoke-on Trent, Barnsley, Rochdale and Wigan are given the support they need to build on their rich cultural heritage.

Reforming the planning system in England

- The current planning system enables some developers to benefit disproportionately and unfairly from the land they develop.
- The UK Government is developing models for a new infrastructure levy that will enable local authorities to capture value from development more efficiently, securing the affordable housing and infrastructure communities need.

Homeownership and housing quality

- The UK Government is giving communities in England more powers to develop a shared vision of the future of their area.
- Since 2012, over 2,800 groups have started the neighbourhood planning process in areas that cover more than 14m people.
- The UK Government has made available over £34.5m of support for Neighbourhood Planning in 2018 to 2022, enabling communities to shape the places in which they live, decide the location of new homes, employment, shops and services, as well as protection for green spaces and heritage assets.

Rural proofing

- We will publish the second report on rural proofing in England this spring.
- This report will set out how government departments are working to support levelling up in rural areas, through targeted approaches where needed, and how we are strengthening the rural economy, developing rural infrastructure, delivering rural services and managing the natural environment.

Restoring order, tackling anti-social behaviour and boosting quality of life

- The UK Government recognises the impact that litter, graffiti, and broken windows have on people's pride in where they live and the impact it has on crime and fear of crime and will bring forward plans for a National Spring Clean.
- This will see Community Payback leveraged in support of cleaning up neighbourhoods, simultaneously delivering real improvements for local people while ensuring that justice is seen to be done.
- Additionally, the UK Government will also publish a new plan for anti-social behaviour and quality of life issues, to ensure that those who are terrorised, intimidated, and impacted by this behaviour can be sure that government is on their side and determined to swiftly and effectively tackle the perpetrators.

Local devolution

- Around 40% of the population of England are currently covered by a devolution deal.
- Extending devolution in England means:
 - inviting Cornwall; Derbyshire and Derby; Devon, Plymouth and Torbay; Durham; Hull and East Yorkshire; Leicestershire; Norfolk; Nottinghamshire and Nottingham; and Suffolk to start formal negotiations to agree new County Deals, with the aim of agreeing a number of these deals by autumn 2022
 - taking forward negotiations to agree a MCA deal with York and North Yorkshire and an expanded MCA deal for the North East
 - confirming that other areas, particularly those with broadly similar circumstances to North Yorkshire and York have the opportunity to consider their interest in a MCA devolution deal – for instance, the UK Government will work to secure a mayoral deal in Cumbria and similar areas.
- Deepening devolution in England means:
 - the UK Government will open negotiations immediately on trailblazer deals with the West Midlands and Greater Manchester, which will act as the blueprint for other MCAs to follow
 - working with MCAs, initially as part of the trailblazer deals, to explore options to streamline the funding landscape for MCAs

- inviting other MCAs and the GLA to bid for sweeping further powers, through the new devolution framework.
- Simplifying devolution in England means:
 - setting out the UK Government's new devolution framework to provide greater clarity on the devolution offer across England
 - seeking to legislate to establish a new form of combined authority model to be made up of upper-tier local authorities only (e.g. a county council and its associated unitary councils), providing a single, accountable institution across a functional economic area or whole county geography; district councils can be non-constituent members; and, as set out in Chapter 2, county councils will be expected to work closely with their district councils.
- The Levelling Up Fund (LUF) is investing in capital infrastructure that improves everyday life and has a tangible impact on local places. For round one, the fund invested in projects across three themes: regenerating town centres and high streets, upgrading local transport and investing in cultural and heritage assets. Funding is targeted towards places with the most significant need, as measured by the index of priority places, 443 which takes into account places' need for economic recovery and growth, improved transport connectivity and regeneration, in line with the fund's objectives. The LUF will allocate £4.8bn over the period to 2024-25 and details of future rounds of the fund will be set out soon
- The £3.6bn Towns Fund aims to unleash the economic potential of towns and high streets in England. Towns have been encouraged to make interventions that contribute to the UK's overarching goal of reaching Net Zero by 2050, showing practically how levelling up and Net Zero can go hand in hand. This will be delivered through two elements:
 - Town Deals, which aim to regenerate towns and deliver long-term economic and productivity growth through investments in urban regeneration, planning and land use, skills, heritage and enterprise infrastructure. Up to £25m, and more in exceptional cases, is being invested in each town. All 101 participating towns have had a deal announced, totalling £2.3bn.
- The Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) which aims to renew and reshape town centres and high streets in England in a way that drives growth and ensures future sustainability. In total, 72 places will share over £830m.
- The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) will increase life chances and build pride in place across the UK, by empowering places to invest in local priorities across three priority areas: communities and place, people and skills, and local business.

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

- [Pre-Launch Guidance for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) was published alongside the Levelling Up White Paper.
- The fund is a central pillar of the levelling up agenda and a significant component of support for places across the UK, providing funding of £2.6 billion by March 2025, with all areas of the UK receiving an allocation from the Fund via a funding formula rather than a competition.
- In England, the fund will primarily operate over the strategic geographies of the Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Greater London Authority, and lower-tier or unitary authorities elsewhere.
- In February and March, the UK Government will run a series of webinars and engagement activities with local authorities and other stakeholders.
- Local authorities with responsibility for the Fund can start preparing for the launch of the fund by starting early conversations about how the Fund can best support the people and businesses in their community to thrive and grow, and identifying local partners and stakeholders who can provide advice and insight on local needs.

- Comprehensive and balanced local partnerships will be a core component of how the Fund will be administered locally. Local leaders will be tasked to work with a diverse range of local stakeholders, civic society organisations, employer bodies responsible for identifying local skills plans, and businesses to achieve Fund outcomes in their areas.
- Local partners will support the authority leading the Fund in each place to develop an investment plan, which we will commission from each place later in the spring.
- Working to a UK-wide framework published by the UK Government, local partners will influence the Fund through development and delivery of an investment plan for each place.
- Investment priorities for the Fund are communities and place, local businesses, people and skills and the Multiply programme.
- Further information on the Fund will be published in the Spring.

Engagement and Informal Consultation

- Levelling up is a collective endeavour. Success in closing spatial disparities across the UK will rely on input, buy-in and partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including local leaders, devolved administrations, businesses, civil society, academics and think tanks.
- Many of the policies contained within the programme of change will need to be co-designed and co-delivered. To that end, the UK Government will put in place a comprehensive process of engagement and informal consultation to inform levelling up delivery and future policy-making, and avoid the siloed, short-term and small-scale approaches that have hindered attempts to tackle spatial disparities in the past.
- Some of the key elements of this process include:
 - structured process of visits, at ministerial level, across the whole of the UK in the months following publication of this White Paper, to discuss how levelling up can be successfully achieved in that area and to gather feedback
 - an ongoing, long-term commitment for further ministerial visits across the whole of the UK, to update on progress on the policy programme and missions
 - setting up local panels, drawn from a wide range of stakeholders, to serve as a sounding board on levelling up delivery and implementation, working closely with the new Levelling Up Directors once established
 - annual reports summarising key messages from these local panels, which will feed into the UK Government's Cabinet Committee on Levelling Up
 - an online space where local ideas, proposals and initiatives around levelling up can be heard and co-ordinated, to spread knowledge and understanding of what has worked locally and to foster innovation and experimentation.
- The UK Government will work with local leaders, citizens and sector experts to establish a body to focus on local data, transparency and outcomes.
- Strengthening local data will be the cornerstone for this body, to empower citizens with a greater knowledge of their place and support local authorities to learn from one another and be more user-focused.
- The UK Government is exploring a new approach to place through Levelling Up Directors. They will provide a key point of contact for local areas, acting as a bridge between local leaders and central government. The UK Government will work with local partners to tailor and develop the model to ensure that it is rooted in what places need.
- The UK Government will engage with local government and key stakeholders on the simplification of the local growth funding landscape with respect to the publication of further plans later this year. There will be a specific role for expert advisory committees, run as sub-groups of the Levelling Up Advisory Council. These will serve as a confidential forum for engagement between experts on the major cross-cutting themes of this White Paper. Themes covered by these expert sub-committees are likely to include:

- regional adoption and diffusion infrastructure
- the role of private sector capital in levelling up and strategies for encouraging more institutional investment
- local communities and social infrastructure – the role of neighbourhood policies and strategies for building community capacity in left-behind areas.

Future Legislation

- The UK Government will bring forward legislation to put in statute some of the key pillars of levelling up to ensure this new framework is built on strong foundations.
- Provisions will include:
 - introducing an obligation for the UK Government to publish an annual report on delivery against the levelling up missions
 - strengthening devolution legislation in England in order to expand devolution to more places, deepen current devolution deals and enable the devolution process to be simpler and more transparent
 - implement reforms to the planning system including provisions around compulsory purchase powers and support for reusing brownfield land.
- More details on these reforms will be published in due course.