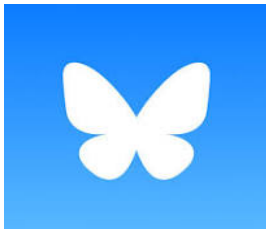




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APSE Southern Parks Seminar 2025

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution - What does it mean for Local Authority Parks and Open spaces?

- Funding issues for neighbourhood level services
- What powers and responsibilities will sit with combined and mayoral authorities? What remains at a council level?
- With new neighbourhood funding and neighbourhood boards protect our local parks assets?

Local Government Reorganisation: what will it mean to Parks Services?

- The English Devolution White Paper
- Differences in Council Types
- Counties (Waste disposal, social care, education catering, highways)
- Districts (Waste collection, parks, public realm, housing)
- Unitary

Why Unitary?

- Simplified system of local government
- Efficiencies?
- Bigger footprint – population size over 500,000 people
- Ultimately saving money for the public purse...
- Already in place in Wales, Scotland (and to some extent Northern Ireland)

The Roadmap to Change

- Application to the Devo Priority Areas
- Approval needed from the Minister
- Suspension of elections (if applicable)
- Proposals already being submitted to the SofS
- Legislation before Parliament (slightly different process for unitary changes).
- Shadow Authority
- But then the hard work.....

Councillors

- Fewer councillors (More powers...?)
- Politics with a big P and small p!
- Disruptors to local political institutions / parties
- Council leaders – fewer overall
- Voting pattern changes

What about the workers?

- TUPE or not TUPE ...that is the question..
- No...is the answer but....
- Cabinet Office Code of Practice – TUPE in all but name
- Still workforce fall out
- Redundancies
- Equal Pay
- Managerial tiers (tears)....

Service Delivery

- 'New' to some services
- Merger of multiple services
- Capacity
- Models of delivery – outsourced models – do they give rise to opportunities to insource?
- Systems and operational delivery – resolving conflicts

Assets, Efficiencies and Optimal Efficiency

- What existing buildings do you have?
- What parks and public realm will form the basis of a new Unitary council?
- Reviewing the property and asset register
- 'Service assets' such as depots
- Rationalisation? Sell-offs? Refurbish or Repurpose?
- Can efficiencies be realised?

Optimal Efficiency

- Optimal efficiency = Reducing waste and scaling production to match demand.
- But.....not as simply as economies of scale in some aspects of service delivery
- Care needed not to create more inefficient or ineffective delivery of services



Predecessors, successors, legacies, data, debts and culture

- Do you know your neighbour's wealth?
- Buying a house with all its contents...?
- Legacy issues? Debts, litigation, toxic culture, reputation?
- Transformation and change opportunities?
- Getting workforce buy-in to change?
- Risk of brain drain?

Thinking about the future of your parks

- What models of delivery do you currently operate under and what about the new Unitary?
- Are contracts coming to a natural end?
- Do you have capacity in one council to insource?
- What is the budget position?
- What are the maintenance regimes?
- What about working hours and practices?
- What about policies on biodiversity? Climate change?



English Devolution White Paper (2024): Now the Devo Bill.

Implications for council parks teams

Do powers risk shifting to strategic authorities?

English Devolution – Overview

- Focus on empowering local leaders through devolution deals
- Emphasis on green infrastructure, climate resilience, and health
- Aims to streamline decision-making and integrate funding
- Strategic authorities will assume broader strategic control
- *“Finally, we will expand Strategic Authorities’ role in leading Local Nature Recovery Strategies”* - Greater powers, responsibilities, and resources to coordinate

So... does the White Paper risk transferring powers from council parks teams to strategic authorities?

Potential risks for council parks teams

Centralisation at strategic authority level

- Strategic control over green infrastructure may shift regionally
- Local influence over biodiversity or regeneration priorities could weaken

Loss of direct funding streams

- New regional investment models may centralise budgets
- Risk of reduced autonomy for city-level projects

Distance from decision-making

- Parks teams may have less influence on region-wide strategies
- Risk of misalignment with community needs

Factors that mitigate the risk / Opportunities

Devolution deals are negotiated locally

- Councils help shape powers and roles in each region

Councils retain operational control

- Park maintenance and delivery remain local responsibilities

Opportunity for strategic collaboration

- Potential to shape regional policy while preserving local voice
- Green corridors and regional ecological strategies

What parks teams can do

- Engage early in devolution discussions
- Secure representation on regional green infrastructure boards
- Advocate for clear local vs. regional governance roles
- Provide data to demonstrate local value and delivery effectiveness

Do powers risk shifting to strategic authorities?

With proactive negotiation, alignment and strategic positioning, council parks teams can retain influence while benefiting from new regional resources and visibility



Questions..

Over to YOU!



Association for Public Service Excellence

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