



# LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION 2030

## *Meet our Commissioners*

- Paul O'Brien, Commission Chair
- Lord Gary Porter, CBE
- Elma Murray, OBE
- Heather Wakefield
- Jon Collins
- Neil Schneider





LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
COMMISSION  
2030



# The final report: Local by default

[Local by default – APSE’s Local Government Commission Report 2030](#)



## 50 years of contraction

- Reducing role, powers and resources
- Uneasy relationship
- Less legitimacy



## Pressure building

- Growing public policy crises
- Austerity
- System under huge strain
- Then Covid
- System overload
- Central / local



# Revitalising local government: What we heard?

- Too often local government is subordinated to the centre.
- Support for the constitutional protection of local government.
- Fragmented delivery of local services and responsibilities held by other public bodies.
- Calls for local government to be the 'custodian of place', integrating local service delivery.



# Revitalising local government

1. The role and powers of local government should be enshrined in a constitutional settlement.
2. There should be clarity for the public over the responsibilities of local, regional, and national government.
3. Government should agree and develop, in consultation with local government and the devolved administrations, a clear devolution framework, based on the principles of subsidiarity, local autonomy and flexibility. This should include a clear indication of powers and funding available and should allow all local authorities to access/benefit from it, although at a pace and scale that fits best local needs.



# Revitalising local government

4. Based on the principles set out in the framework, the Commission calls for new 'Devolution Bills' for all the nations of the UK. The Bills should not provide a 'one size fits all' approach across the nations of the UK, but deliver a flexible, place-based model of devolution that can benefit all areas by improving governance and addressing inequalities.

5. The Commission calls for the creation of permanent National Governance Committees across nations of the UK, which should be consulted for any law and policy-making processes that affect directly local government and devolved institutions (such as reforms and re-organisation).



## Roles and responsibilities

- Tackling multiple crises
- Reshape, regenerate, repurpose
- Creating healthy places to live and work
- Building skills and knowledge
- Tomorrow's world





# The roles and powers of local government

6. The Commission supports local government determining its own structures, scales and size. Councils should be left to determine for themselves the organisation, configuration, and modes of service delivery, as fitting with local circumstances and choice.

7. In England, we propose that structural reforms, mergers or reductions in scale are submitted to an independent and representative Standing Commission. This Standing Commission would make recommendations on proposals to central government.

8. New powers should be transferred to local government as a major step towards the integration of local services and accountability for place-based services. The Commission strongly supports local government exercising responsibility for primary health care, local policing, funding for public housing and for further education and the management of local schools (allowing for differences across the devolved nations).



# A sustainable financial settlement: What we heard?

- The current system of local government funding is not sustainable.
- Unevenness of cuts to funding, which have hit the poorest the hardest.
- Pressures on services from rising demand for social care.
- Limits of localisation and the continued need for redistribution between authorities.
- Disjointed and demanding of rounds of competitive bidding.
- Acceleration and intensification of local financial pressures during the COVID-19 pandemic, notably from falling income.



## A sustainable financial settlement

9. Local government requires a long-term sustainable financial settlement. This sustainable financial settlement should ensure that every council has sufficient resources to exercise its roles and responsibilities and meet the needs of its communities. In keeping with the principle of local by default, councils should be free to use such resources as they see fit, consistent with the demands of democratic accountability. This national settlement should be agreed for a five-year period, with any further powers or roles and responsibilities transferred to local government during the period of the settlement bringing additional funding.



## A sustainable financial settlement

10. To guarantee that councils do not once again experience an unfair share of the burden of cuts to public funding, total local government funding should not fall below an agreed minimum percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This guaranteed level of funding should be seen as a minimum threshold that recognises that locally provided services are of equal importance to those within the NHS, education and the activities of central government.
11. It will be for the local government sector itself to decide how funding is allocated between authorities



## A sustainable financial settlement

12. A significant proportion of the national settlement for local government will continue to be raised locally. There should be a re-valuation and reform of the Council Tax and a reform of Business Rates.
13. In addition to its share of the national settlement, local councils should be free to raise additional funding as they see fit, through increases to general and specific local taxes, and hypothecated taxes.
14. During the transition towards this new financial settlement, government should agree a multi-year funding settlement with local government to ensure stability in the short term.
15. Centrally funded national programmes should no longer be distributed through competitive funding but on clear principles agreed by central and local government.



## Local democracy, representation and accountability: What we heard?

- Models of political leadership and decision-making should be a matter for local choice.
- Councillors are under pressure - the image of the local councillor needs to be improved and the pool of people standing for election to local government broadened.
- Demographic profile of councillors needs to be more diversify and barriers to election and standing as a candidate removed for all social groups.
- Institutional complexity and churn, particularly in England, has confused lines of accountability.
- Calls for councils to be recognised as the 'democratic anchor' in a place, with its powers of scrutiny extended to cover all local services.



## Local democracy, representation and accountability

16. Models of political leadership and organisation should remain a matter for local discretion. There should be no 'top down' imposition of any particular form of organising.
17. Local scrutiny should be strengthened with formal recognition of local government, the locally elected body, as scrutineer of other agencies and services in a place, with formal rights to information and meaningful impact. This might take the form of Local Public Accounts Committees. In return, councils themselves should be open to independent scrutiny.



## Local democracy, representation and accountability

18. It is strongly recognised that communities are better served when the body of councillors reflects the diversity of their communities. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty to tackle discrimination, councils as public authorities should develop and report on local action plans to make strident and conscious efforts to ensure access to political office for people of all backgrounds. The development of local action plans should be supported by national local government bodies and associations.

19. There should be better remuneration, training, and support for local councillors, as well as the introduction of a national remuneration scheme for councillors in England. National bodies on remuneration should make recommendations on how councils can best support the work of local councillors and ensure access to political office to all.





# Organisation and the workforce: What we heard?

- The fragmented jigsaw of local government structures in England is a repeated source of confusion.
- No agreement on an organisational size for local authorities which is appropriate for all areas.
- Severe and uneven reductions to the local government workforce and the differential working conditions between local government and other public services.
- Evidence that job cuts across local government have impacted the most on women.
- The 'top' of local government remains unrepresentative of women, BAME communities, and people with disabilities.
- Calls for career development pathways to encourage people into, and retain them, in local government.



## Organisation and the workforce

20. It is recognised that communities are better served when the local government workforce reflects their diversity. The Commission supports the introduction of a duty for the local government workforce to be representative of the communities it serves, with an annual reporting mechanism on progress.
21. The Commission calls for the creation of a national linked system of pay and conditions across the public sector, removing pay gaps between equivalent jobs in local government and other public services, in line with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.



## Organisation and the workforce

22. The Commission calls for the establishment of new skills and capability career pathways into local government, training and career development for existing employees, and workforce planning to counter the ageing workforce. The Commission recognises the particular urgency for career pathways in the environment and climate change mitigation, digitalisation, and the care economy in the post-Covid recovery.
23. The Commission argues that providing an integrated set of services directly, that are democratically accountable but flexible and adaptable to local people's needs, should be the default option for local services where they are best able to provide high quality, effective and socially just outcomes for local communities and local economies.



# Addressing inequalities and engaging communities: What we heard?

- Evidence that cuts to local services together with welfare changes have disproportionately impacted on women, particularly BAME, lone parents and disabled women.
- Evidence of cuts to services for young people and the need to consistently address the impacts of policies on future generations.
- How there has been a fall in the capacity of the voluntary and community sector and an increased dependence on the sector on contractual income.
- Local authorities are able to act as a potential or partial 'buffer' against the cuts, but they cannot tackle inequalities across communities alone.
- Calls for a renewed ethos of co-production and community planning, and innovative use of for example deliberative forums and citizen assemblies.
- Evidence that councils are increasingly working to strengthen the foundational and caring economies.



## Addressing inequalities and engaging communities

24. Councils should follow a principle of care to ensure that community engagement encourages all voices, provides diverse modes of engagement, and aligns representative and participatory forms of decision-making.
25. Councils should look to the long-term impacts of their decisions and work with young people to ensure positive outcomes for current and future generations.
26. Councils should comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty and undertake meaningful equality impact assessments that evaluate how outcomes of their policies impact on services across their diverse communities.



# Addressing inequalities and engaging communities

27. The role of councillors as community leaders should be strengthened through individual councillor budgets and acceptance of the principle that councillors have the right to be engaged in any decisions or negotiations impacting on their wards.
28. Where possible, councils should use the council pound to buy local and support inclusive economic growth and community well-being.



## How do we fix the system?

- Big bang or incremental
- Ministers as champions of change
- Royal commission or constitutional convention
- Subnational governance committee
- Devolution and subsidiarity
- Localism by default