

Improvement

Devolution explained

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What is Devolution?

Devolution is the transfer of powers and funding from UK government to local authority level. It is important because decisions are made closer to the local people, communities and businesses they affect.

Devolution would provide greater freedoms and flexibilities for councils to work more effectively to improve public services and outcomes for residents and businesses.

What does devolution look like?

A devolution deal will create a new single body, known as a Strategic Authority, for Essex. It would initially take the form of a combined county authority.

These arrangements will be agreed prior to the first Mayoral election, which will take place in May 2026.

The key functions of the strategic authority would include strategic transport functions, such as support for buses, trains and concessionary fares, skills and driving economic growth.

What would devolution mean for us?

For us in **Thurrock**, devolution could mean:

- better skills because money is spent locally rather than by the UK government
- better jobs because this will be co-ordinated by a Mayor
- a stronger voice with UK government – at the moment the UK government finds it difficult to know how to talk to Thurrock as a place

Across **Thurrock and Greater Essex**, devolution could mean:

- better co-ordination of transport across the whole county
- more strategic control over planning and housing

You can read more about devolution in other areas

- Greater Manchester Combined Authority (<https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/>) (seven devolution deals since 2009)
- West Midlands Combined Authority (<https://www.wmca.org.uk/>) (three devolution deals since 2015)

What is Greater Essex?

Greater Essex refers to the combined area represented by Thurrock Council, Essex County Council, and Southend-on-Sea City Council.

What is the Devolution Priority Programme?

The Devolution Priority Programme is for areas aiming to move towards devolution quickly. It is aimed at areas wishing to establish a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

The Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution has outlined that participants must have local agreement to progress around a sensible geographical area.

What is a Strategic Authority?

A Strategic Authority is a legal body set up using national legislation, with its own board and governance arrangements.

This will enable a group of two or more councils to collaborate and make collective decisions across council boundaries.

Depending on the form of devolution in an area, there are three levels of Strategic Authority available:

- **Foundation Strategic Authority:** Available to those areas without an elected Mayor. It will have limited devolution. For example, the current Lancashire devolution deal will establish a Foundation Strategic Authority.
- **Mayoral Strategic Authority:** For those with an elected Mayor, a range of powers will be devolved. For example, the West of England is a Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- **Established Mayoral Strategic Authority:** For those Mayoral Strategic Authorities, who are able to satisfy a number of additional governance requirements. They will have access to the most devolution. Greater Manchester and the West Midlands are already at this stage

We are committed to establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority by May 2026.

Does this mean we will get a Mayor?

Yes, the government's plan for devolution includes a directly elected Mayor. Elections for a Mayor for Greater Essex will be held in May 2026. We expect the Mayor to ultimately take on the current role of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex.

What powers will the elected mayor have?

The Mayor will be directly elected by the people of Essex. The elected Mayor will have the ability to speak directly to government ministers and secure funding for local projects. They will be able to make strategic decisions, help attract investment and improve infrastructure.

What is the role of a directly elected Mayor in a Mayoral Strategic Authority compared to a local council Mayor?

The main difference lies in their scope of responsibilities and the level of governance they oversee.

A directly elected Mayor in a Mayoral Strategic Authority has a broader role that typically covers multiple local councils within a Combined or Strategic Authority. The directly elected Mayor has significant powers over strategic functions such as:

- economic development
- housing
- infrastructure
- transport

For example, in Essex the elected Mayor would also serve as the Police, Fire, and Crime Commissioner. The Mayor would make strategic decisions, help attract investment and improve infrastructure.

On the other hand, a Mayor for a local council is responsible for the governance of a single local authority. The mayor's powers are more focused on the day-to-day administration and local services within that specific council area. They work closely with the council to implement policies and manage local services such as:

- community services
- local planning
- waste collection

The key difference is that a Mayor in a Mayoral Strategic Authority has a wider, more strategic role that spans multiple councils. Local council Mayors focus on the governance and services within a single local authority.

What is the role of Mayors compared to Council Leaders?

The government believes that within Strategic Authorities, Mayors should have a unique role to focus on devolved responsibilities. Council leaders are expected to lead their areas and deliver essential services.

What is a Combined Authority?

A combined authority is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries. It is expected that Combined Authorities will be replaced by Strategic Authorities.

Read more about Combined Authorities (<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/combined-authorities-plaifb6.pdf>) in the LGA's publication.

When can we expect this to take place?

Now we have received confirmation that we are on the Priority Programme, we are committed to establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority by May 2026. Mayoral elections would take place in that month.

Does devolution mean the council elections in May 2025 will be postponed?

The government has confirmed that it will be postponing elections due to take place in the Thurrock in May 2025. The postponement would be for an initial period of a year, but if proposals to reorganise local authorities are agreed, it is likely that there would be no further elections to Thurrock until its abolition, other than by-elections.

Do residents have a say in this?

The government has launched a consultation on devolution in Greater Essex which will run until 13 April. This will be supported by local activity in Thurrock to reinforce messages with local audiences including residents and businesses. Fill out the consultation now (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/greater-essex-devolution/greater-essex-devolution-consultation>)

Thurrock Council is also looking at how we can engage residents as plans for local government reorganisation are developed and will keep local people updated on ways to get involved, through our council enewsletter and social media accounts.

Related Links:

- The Government's White Paper on English Devolution (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>) (published December 2024)
- The Local Government Association (<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/devolution-hub/devolution-and-local-government-reorganisation-frequently-asked#:~:text=A%3A%20Devolution%20is%20the%20transfer,government%20are%20organised%20between%20councils.>) has answered some general questions on Devolution and related topics.

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