



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

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All Council Leaders, All Mayors, and All Chief
Executives

12 February 2026

Dear Leaders, Mayors, and Chief Executives,

Economic growth is the number one mission of this government. We know that growth is best achieved when local leaders are empowered to think strategically across the right geographies, supported by strong institutions, and when they have the ability to plan for the long term. This belief has underpinned our ambitious programme of deepening and extending devolution. It has also guided many of our changes to the planning system.

We are determined to keep up the pace on these vital reforms. That is why we wrote to you before Christmas about our overhaul of national planning policy, and it is why today we are taking two further steps: publishing a non-statutory consultation on the geographies for Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs), so that we can confirm the areas across which the new system of strategic planning will operate; and inviting expressions of interest from authorities without an existing devolution agreement to be part of a new wave of Foundation Strategic Authorities (FSAs) across England.

Spatial Development Strategies

The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 reinstates a strategic planning system for England. Once the provisions in the Act are commenced – which is expected by the summer – places will be required to produce an SDS. These strategies will deal with strategic and cross-boundary issues and set the context for local plans, which will have to be in ‘general conformity’ with the umbrella SDS once adopted. By taking a sub-regional view of how growth needs can be sustainably met, they will help us build more homes, co-ordinate the delivery of strategic infrastructure, grow the economy, and improve the environment and climate resilience.

We strongly believe that strategic planning, as just one part of the growth equation, is most effective when done over devolution geographies. Aligning it with Strategic Authorities’ transport, skills, and economic development powers will help ensure better integrated, more effective delivery. This is why we set out, in the English Devolution White Paper, that Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be empowered to produce SDSs for their regions, and why we are giving Mayors strategic development management powers through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, currently before Parliament. This will enable Mayoral Strategic Authorities to guide planning applications of

potential strategic importance to ensure that the overall strategy and any policies within the SDS are being implemented.

For parts of the country currently without mayoral devolution, we have set out that SDSs need to be developed across 'sensible geographies' in line with the principles of the English Devolution White Paper. Today we are launching a consultation on what these sensible geographies might be. In some places, there is already broad agreement on them, and we have indicated these in the consultation. In other places, we do not believe there is a consensus view yet, and so we are seeking proposals from you that align with the 'sensible geography' criteria in the White Paper.

Where SDSs are not coterminous with Strategic Authorities, the formal mechanism for areas to work together on their SDS will be a Strategic Planning Board (SPB), which will be established through secondary legislation. We will undertake statutory consultation prior to establishing these boards, alongside more detailed engagement and discussion with relevant authorities. This is expected to take place in the spring for most areas, but there may be an opportunity to move ahead with this more quickly where there is clear agreement, in which case MHCLG officials will be in contact with authorities about the details of an SPB during the consultation period.

A new wave of Foundation Strategic Authorities

Given our belief that sensible strategic planning and devolution geographies will, in the vast majority of cases, be one and the same, the development of SDS footprints is also an opportunity to agree the shape of devolution geographies for areas currently without a Strategic Authority. The government is therefore inviting these places to come forward with expressions of interest for the establishment of new FSAs, which must meet the criteria in the English Devolution White Paper and therefore should, typically, align with SDS geographies. As you would expect, we are also working across government to ensure this approach aligns with other reform programmes affecting public service boundaries, including the current Review of Police Structures.

FSAs will have devolved powers over local transport and skills, as well as being responsible for delivering the area's SDS where the SDS boundary is coterminous with the FSA. There are then a further set of powers and partnerships available to FSAs – the full FSA offer is set out in Devolution Framework at Section 3.10 of the English Devolution White Paper. The government is also currently consulting on giving FSAs the power to raise an Overnight Visitor Levy, which would be an additional power not currently in the Devolution Framework.

The government remains firmly committed to mayoral devolution and is forging ahead with it – including through our Devolution Priority Programme – but we have been clear that this model works best when built on firm foundations. This includes the strong unitary structures we are creating through local government reorganisation, and we remain fully committed to delivering these important reforms within this Parliament to the timetable set out. Alongside this, we see FSAs – as non-mayoral Combined or Combined County Authorities – to be a valuable way to build local capacity and partnerships, and as a stepping stone towards mayoral devolution in the future. While we recognise the demands that delivering reorganisation places on local authorities, we do not see that as a barrier to conversations about the establishment of FSAs and how to devolve powers to unleash local growth. We want to discuss with local authorities interested in taking this forward how best to manage the two processes effectively.

We would therefore like to invite all areas in England without an existing devolution agreement to come forward with their neighbours to take on devolution through an FSA over a sensible geography. We welcome expressions of interest over the coming weeks and we will begin reviewing responses from 20 March.

This will help sustain momentum on this exciting next stage of empowering local government and ensure the government delivers the benefits of devolution to all parts of England as soon as we can. It is important that all expressions of interest have the support from the relevant authorities and meet the criteria set out in the English Devolution White Paper.

As we said in our letter just before Christmas, it is only through continued close working between all of us that we will deliver the homes, jobs and improved living standards we owe to those we serve. The steps we are taking today will help embed that cooperation not just in this Parliament, but for years to come.

Best Wishes,



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Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for
Devolution, Faith and Communities



MATTHEW PENNYCOOK MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning