



Meeting	Finance, Premises and general purpose
Date	Wednesday 26 th March 2025
Report Title	24.063 Devolution update
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The following presentation was given at the Town and Parish Forum on Wednesday 5th March 2025.

What is Government's aim?

- Drive savings and efficiencies
- 'Simplified' Local Government Structure
 - Unitary councils of over 500,000 population (flexible)
 - Strategic / Combined Authorities of 2-3 unitaries with an elected mayor, population around 1.5m
 - DPM's 'Council of Leaders' – elected mayors
- Devolving powers and funding from Government 'closer to communities'
- Mayors responsible for wider public services eg Police, health, strategic planning, growth plans

Timeline

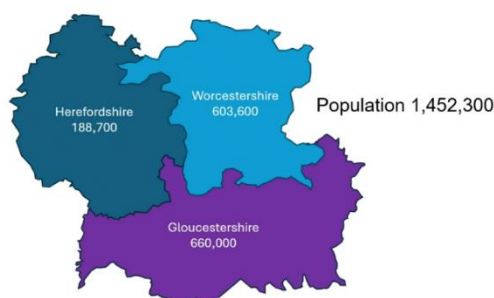
When	Who	What
16/12/2024	Government	English Devolution White Paper published, letters to all councils in two tier areas
10/01/25	Upper tier councils	GCC submitted requests to postpone elections by 1 year, districts (with exception of TBC) opposed
By 31/01/25 (but actually 5/02/25)	Government	Missed its own deadline to confirm which areas will be included in Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) with elections in May 2026 – Gloucestershire not included. Statutory invitation for unitary proposals from all councils in two tier areas, including Gloucestershire
By 21/03/25	Two tier councils	Submit initial reorganisation plans to Government
By 28/11/25	All other two tier councils / areas	Submit final reorganisation proposals to Government
May 2027	All other two tier councils/ areas	Hold elections for shadow unitaries and / or strategic / combined authorities
April 2028	All other two tier councils / areas	New structure comes into effect

Questions for Gloucestershire

1. What does unitary look like?
2. Which other unitaries to join to form a strategic / combined authority (with an elected mayor)?
3. How to create a model for place working across the County recognising community level delivery

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- 7 councils – GCC plus 6 districts will be forced to form either a
- Single unitary to cover whole of Gloucestershire
- OR Multiple unitary authorities in the area depending on whether district boundaries change
- Government have requested 1 plan however; Gloucestershire are currently working on different proposals as cannot come to one shared conclusion on how best to proceed. The proposal is to put forward several different options and ask the government to make final approval.

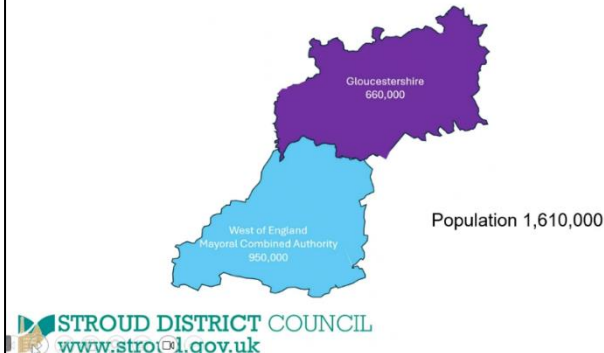
Which Strategic Authority? North – Herefordshire & Worcestershire



Option 1 – look to combine North.

Issue with this proposal is generally people from Stroud would not identify with being from the midlands/ north. This would make it difficult to create a shared sense of place and belonging.

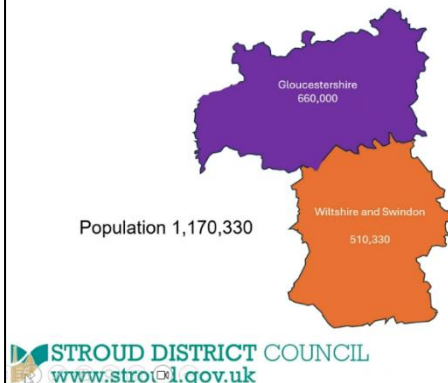
Which Strategic Authority? SW – West of England Combined Authority



Option 2 - Join WECA – multiple councils have already formed unitary in this area. It is geographically close, and people would generally associate more with this area.

Main issue here is that it is not in conservative control, so GCC do not support this option. However, the elections in May may impact this.

Which Strategic Authority? SE – Swindon and Wiltshire



Option 3 - Go South-East. This would create a slightly smaller authority

Other things to consider

- Need to be fully engaged to shape the future
- Need to centre thinking on what's best for residents, tenants, businesses, staff
- Strategic first
 - need to identify our priorities and what needs to continue in new structure – Council Plan helpful
 - Need to identify and mitigate risks (eg staff retention and recruitment)
- Detail later – will need to consider how services will merge, sustainable future for important assets etc with countywide partners

What is happening now?

- Cross county working
 - Currently 10 different Workstreams
 - How to make LGR work in Gloucestershire
 - Which Strategic / Combined Authority to be part of
 - Principles to guide joint working
 - Identifying questions we need Government to answer

Public consultation will take place over the summer

Countywide workstreams

(county and district leads for each, mostly officers)

Area of work	Role / deliverables
Establish political board	Decision making and political oversight
Chief Executives Group	Supporting and advising board
Liaison with MHCLG	Negotiation / information sharing
Programme management	Planning and coordination of programme activities Managing risks and issues logs
Vision and ambition	Statement of vision / ambition for place
Place model	Issues and options for locality working and governance (including Town and Parish Councils)
People and culture	Principles / values / ways of working
Communications	Stakeholder map and plan Regular communications
Strategic / Combined Authority options	Options appraisal, develop proposal
Unitary options	Options appraisal, develop proposal

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What councils need to agree

- By 21 March 2025 – initial plan for Local Government Reorganisation
- By 28 November 2025 – final plan for LGR
- Strategic Authority footprint

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Next steps

- Workstreams up and running with county and district co-leads
- Commitment to continue working with Town and Parish Councils
- Extraordinary meeting of full Council 20 March
- Initial plans for Gloucestershire LGR submitted to Government 21 March

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What does this mean for Town and Parish Councils? We are not sure! They have largely been left out of discussions but you must assume that some services and functions will come down to parish level. We just don't know what, or when.

Impact on Parish and Town Councils

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For Local Council Professionals

Parish and town councils rarely mentioned in the White Paper, but it does say:

“We will also rewire the relationship between town and parish councils and principal Local Authorities, strengthening expectations on engagement and community voice”.

(Unverified)

What does devolution mean?

Devolution means **devolving power and funding away from central government to more local control**

Based on principle of **Subsidiarity** which means that decisions should always be taken at the lowest possible level or closest to where they will have their effect