The past and future of English devolution: Opportunities for food systems change

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A short recent history of English devolution (1997-2024)

- **1986**: Metropolitan County Councils abolished
- **1997**: Regional Development Agencies Act 1998
- **2000-2004**: Commitment to Elected Regional Assemblies
- **2004**: North East Referendum
- **2010**: Public Bodies Act & Localism Act 2011
- **2004**: North East Referendum
- **2011**: Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016
- **2011**: Regional Development Agencies
- **2014-present**: New process of English devolution
- **2016**: Devolution framework
- **2016**: Devolution framework
- **2022**: Update to devolution framework enables County Combined Authorities
- **2023-2024**: ‘Trailblazer’ deals
- **2011-present**: Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)
- **2011**: Manchester CA
- **2014**: South and West Yorkshire CAs
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- **2014**: South and West Yorkshire CAs
- **2016**: Devolution framework
- **2023**: Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023
A short recent history of English devolution (1997-2024)

1998: Regional Development Agencies Act

2000: Metropolitan County Councils abolished

2000-2004: Commitment to Elected Regional Assemblies

2004: North East Referendum

2009: Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act

2011: Public Bodies Act & Localism Act

2014: Devolution framework

2016: Update to devolution framework enables County Combined Authorities

2018: Cities and Local Government Devolution Act

2019: Levelling-up and Regeneration Act

2020: New process of English devolution

2022: Update to devolution framework enables County Combined Authorities

2023-2024: ‘Trailblazer’ deals

2011-present: Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

1998-2011: Regional Development Agencies

2000: London Assembly and Mayor

2011: Manchester CA

2014: South and West Yorkshire CAs
(Mayoral) Combined Authorities

- CAs most robust legal form of regional and cross-boundary collaboration
- “A link between geography and the effectiveness of a combined authority. This is about administrative coherence, scale and the importance of reflecting the economic and transport geography.” (LGA 2021)
- Each MCA agrees a bespoke deal with national government

Devolution Framework (DLUHC, 2023)

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<td>Strategic role in delivering services</td>
<td>Level 1+ Adult education, LEP (partial), UK Shared Prosperity Fund</td>
<td>Level 2+ Mayor, transport, local roads, urban regeneration, investment funds to support regional economic growth</td>
<td>Level 3+ Skills and careers, local energy planning, local growth and place, housing and regeneration</td>
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<td>Mayors can establish development corporations to influence planning and development</td>
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The current state of English devolution

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<td>Mayoral Combined Authorities agreed</td>
<td>Suffolk, Norfolk, Greater Lincolnshire, Hull and East Yorkshire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Mayoral Combined Authorities agreed</td>
<td>Lancashire, Devon and Torbay, and Cornwall</td>
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Devolution currently covers:
• 48% of England’s population,
• 54% of its economic output,
• 26% of the land area.

If all the new deals are implemented as planned in 2025, this will increase to:
• 64% of England’s population,
• 67% of its economic output,
• 54% of the land area
(Institute of Government, 2024)
The role of Mayors

“We have identified four different styles, which each mayor is deploying in different permutations. The styles are disrupter, convenor, leader and advocate. In practice this can mean: disrupting by bringing new perspectives to longstanding challenges; convening partners in new modes of collaboration; providing political leadership on challenging issues; and acting as an advocate for the place regionally and nationally” (LGA 2021)

Political capital that has enabled Mayors to extend their remit and drive local-regional change.

Aligns with European cities where Mayors hold significant political agency
The Institute for Government recently called for the extension of devolution to 85% of England by the end of the next parliament.

The Levelling Up White Paper (2023) makes a commitment that “every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution” by 2030, opening up the possibility of devolution to all areas of England.

**Labour (2024)**

- A new, clearer framework for English devolution which brings together local leaders with central government on a statutory basis.
- A presumption towards devolution, with combined authorities given the right to request powers held elsewhere and central government required to explain what steps they should take to become eligible for new powers.
- A statutory requirement for all combined authorities to adopt Local Growth Plans.
Leveraging food systems change through Mayoral Combined Authorities

- Build on existing progress: free school meals, auto-enrollment, food security, unhealthy food advertising restrictions…
- Frame food in terms of existing policy mandates within the devolution framework
- Mayors matter!
- Think and link internationally: C40 Cities, ICLEI, United Cities Local Government…
- There is a window of opportunity to influence bespoke deals and their implementation
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References