

Directly elected mayors in England

Local authority areas in England typically have an executive leader and a cabinet selected from the local council, similar to how the national prime minister and cabinet are selected from Parliament. In contrast, residents of some areas, or groups of areas known as combined authorities or combined county authorities, directly elect the **executive mayors** of their local government.

The first such political post was the mayor of London, created as the executive of the Greater London Authority in 2000 as part of a reform of the local government of Greater London. Since the Local Government Act 2000, all of the several hundred principal local councils in England and Wales have been required to review their executive arrangements. Mayors who are directly elected to cover combined authorities or combined county authorities are informally known as **metro mayors**, as they typically cover metropolitan areas. Examples of metro mayors include the mayor of Greater Manchester and the mayor of the West Midlands.



Metro mayors in England meeting Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Housing Secretary Angela Rayner in 2024

Legislation on directly elected mayors applies both to England and Wales, but there are currently no directly elected mayors in Wales.

All devolved regional mayors currently have a seat on the Council of Nations and Regions, where they sit alongside the UK Prime Minister and First Ministers of devolved governments.

History

Background

The system of elected mayors had been considered by the Major ministry, and the former Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine had been a proponent of it.^[1] The 1997 Labour manifesto included a commitment to reform local government in London by introducing an elected mayor.^[2]

Mayor of London

The first directly elected mayor was introduced in Greater London in 2000 as part of the statutory provisions of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. The position of the elected Mayor of London is a strategic regional one, and quite different from that of local authority mayors. The work of the Mayor of London is scrutinised by the London Assembly, a unique arrangement in the English local government system. The Mayor of London cannot be removed from office by a referendum following a petition, as is the case for directly elected mayors elsewhere in England.



The three mayors of London (left to right) Ken Livingstone, Boris Johnson and Sadiq Khan

The role should not be confused with the ancient position of Lord Mayor of London, elected annually by liverymen of the City of London.

Local Government Act 2000

Elsewhere in England and Wales, since the Local Government Act 2000, there have been a range of options for how a local council executive leadership can be constituted, and installing a directly elected mayor is one of these options. The 2000 act ended the previous committee-based system, where functions were exercised by committees of the council (although this was reinstated in 2012). All of several hundred principal councils were required to review their executive arrangements under the 2000 legislation. Local authorities considering the option of an elected mayor were required to put the question to a local referendum. It is also possible for campaign groups to trigger a local referendum with a signed petition. A number of areas with elected mayors also have civic mayors or Lord mayors and these ceremonial roles conferred on acting councillors are separate from elected mayors.

From 2000 until 2022 all directly elected mayors in England were elected using the Supplementary Vote electoral system.^[3] Following the passing of the Elections Act 2022, the 2024 election was, and future mayoral elections will be, run using first past the post.

Adoption

Eleven mayors were established during 2002, in both metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts, unitary authorities and London boroughs. Three further mayoralties were created under this legislation: in 2005 (Torbay; abolished 2019),^[4] 2010 (Tower Hamlets),^[5] and 2015 (Copeland).^[6]

Some of the first mayoral elections were won by independents, notably in Hartlepool, where the election was won by Stuart Drummond, who played Hartlepool United's mascot; and in Middlesbrough, where it was won by former police officer Ray Mallon, who left the local police force to stand for election.

Although Wales is included in the legislation, only one Welsh authority, Ceredigion, held a referendum on such a proposal, in May 2004. Over 70% of the voters voted against the proposal.^[7]

Legislative changes

In October 2006, the DCLG white paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* proposed that in future the requirement for a referendum to approve the establishment of an elected mayor for a council area be dropped in favour of a simple resolution of the council following community consultation. It also proposed the direct election of council cabinets where requested, and that the 'mayor and council manager' system in Stoke-on-Trent be reformed into a conventional 'mayor and cabinet' system, it having been the only English council to adopt that system.^[8] The 'mayor and council manager' option was later revoked by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and a referendum was no longer required if two thirds of a council voted in favour of the change in executive model.^[9] The elected cabinet option was not taken forward. The 2007 legislation required all local authorities to review their executive arrangements again and consider the case for an elected mayor.

Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 introduced the combined authority structure. Other subsequent Acts (see below) inserted sections into LDEDCA which created new posts of mayor for combined authorities.

City council mayors

In February 2006, the Institute for Public Policy Research published a report calling for elected mayors in Birmingham and Manchester, which was positively received by the government, but not by the two city councils concerned. Later Prime Minister David Cameron expressed support for the system, saying directly elected mayors are "accountable" and can "galvanise action".^[10] On 2 May 2012, think tank the Bow Group published a short article supporting directly elected mayors in large English cities.^[11]

The Localism Act 2011 permitted central government to trigger referendums for elected mayors,^[12] and this was intended to happen in the largest cities during 2012. Ahead of this, Leicester City Council in 2011 and Liverpool City Council in 2012 exercised their option to have a directly elected mayor without a referendum.^[13] In September 2011 citizens of Salford collected the required number of signatures to force a referendum, which was successful. The first mayoral election took place in May 2012.^[14]

Using the powers in the Localism Act 2011, on 3 May 2012, referendums were held in 10 English cities to decide whether or not to switch to a system that includes a directly elected mayor.^[15] Only one, Bristol, voted for a mayoral system. Doncaster voted to retain its elected mayoral system in a referendum held on the same day.

Combined authority and combined county authority mayors

In 2014 it was announced that mayors would be created as leaders of the Combined Authorities, subject to new primary legislation. In 2017 elections were held for: Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester, Tees Valley, West of England and the West Midlands as part of the devolution deals allowed by the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 inserted sections into the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 for the election of mayors of combined authorities.

A delayed election for the Sheffield City Region followed in May 2018. The North of Tyne Authority and the North East Combined Authority are set to be merged into the new North East Mayoral Combined Authority, which its first election is set to take place in May 2024.^[16]

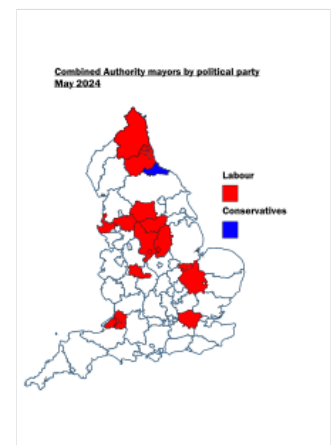
Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023

The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 introduced new types of measures in the local government system in England. Relevantly, the LURA introduced the new combined county authority structure, which is similar to existing combined authorities, created new powers to be devolved to combined authorities, and allowed mayors to take a different title, for example "Governor", "elected leader" or "county commissioner". There are several "devolution deals" that are set to be enshrined in statute following the LURA receiving royal assent.

County leaders

Devolution deals have been agreed in principle with Norfolk and Suffolk which involve directly-elected leaders of each county's council.^[17] Norfolk County Council voted to accept the deal, and pending a resolution, voters will elect a leader in May 2025.^[18] As of May 2024, Suffolk County Council is seeking consultation.^[19]

Removing the post of mayor



A map of Combined Authority mayors' political affiliations in UK, May 2024

Executive arrangement reviews, petitions and local referendums in the Local Government Act 2000 can also be used to remove the post of mayor and revert to the typical "leader and cabinet" executive arrangement. Such methods could not initially be used to remove the post of mayor if it was established following a Government-mandated referendum. However, a House of Lords amendment to the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 amended the Local Government Act 2000 to establish the right of a future referendum to abolish any local authority elected mayor established following a Government-mandated referendum.^[20]

Councillors have complained about the perceived excessive power of directly elected mayors.^{[21][22]} There have been campaigns in four of the local authorities with directly elected mayors to hold referendums to abolish the posts.^[23] In Lewisham, the Bring Back Democracy campaign called for a new referendum, citing poor turnout and a very close result in the 2001 referendum.^[24] In April 2007, Lewisham Council voted 28–24 against a motion calling for consultation over the issue.^[25]

In Doncaster, in March 2007, "Fair Deal" campaigners presented an 11,000-signature petition to the council calling for a new referendum. The council voted 31–27 in favour of a new referendum, which was held in May 2012.^[26] The electorate voted in favour of retaining the mayoralty. The Middlesbrough electorate also voted to retain the mayoral system.^[27]

Three councils have reverted to leader and cabinet executives. The electorate of Stoke-on-Trent voted to remove the post of elected mayor on 23 October 2008, to be replaced with a system of council leader and cabinet.^[28] In November 2012 Hartlepool also voted to scrap the position of directly elected mayor in a referendum.^[29] Liverpool City Council chose to abolish the post of elected mayor and revert to a leader and cabinet model from May 2023 following a 2022 consultation on its future governance.

Referendums were held in North Tyneside and Torbay in May 2016 to determine the future of their mayoralties.^[30] While North Tyneside voted to retain the system, Torbay voted in favour of returning to a leader and cabinet style of governance. Further referendums were held in May 2021 in Newham and Tower Hamlets, which both voted to retain the mayoral system.

Bristol voted to remove the post of elected mayor in a referendum on 5 May 2022, to be replaced with a committee system.^[31]

Simon Jenkins wrote in The Guardian calling metro mayors a "farce of local democracy".^[32]

Scotland and Northern Ireland

The Local Government Act 2000 does not apply in Scotland and the Scottish Parliament has chosen to reform local government instead by introducing the Single Transferable Vote electoral system. The Scottish Conservatives support elected mayors where there is found to be "local demand in our major towns and cities".^[33] A mayor in Scotland is traditionally known as a provost.

There are no directly elected mayors in Northern Ireland. Offices of mayors in Northern Ireland are only a ceremonial position.

Powers

The powers of the mayor are commensurate with the kind of local authority for which they are the executive. London borough councils, metropolitan district councils and unitary authority councils have broadly similar functions, but for non-metropolitan district councils it is a subset, for example not having power over education, libraries and waste management. The Mayor of London has completely different powers to the "mayor and cabinet" leaders.

A local-authority elected mayor has powers similar to those of the executive committee in a Leader and Cabinet model local authority. These are described as either "exclusive" powers or "co-decision" powers and are defined in the Local Government (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000.^[34]

Co-decision powers are those the mayor shares with the council, notably the power to make the local authority's annual budget and its policy framework documents. These are: Annual Library Plan; Best Value Performance Plan; Children's Services Plan; Community Care Plan; Community Strategy; Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy; Early Years Development Plan; Education Development Plan; Local Development Framework; and the Youth Justice Plan. To amend or reject a mayor's proposals for any of these documents, the council must resolve to do so by a two-thirds majority. This is again based on secondary legislation, in this case the Local Government (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001.^[35]

Exclusive powers are less easy to define, because they consist of all the powers that are granted to a local authority by Act of Parliament except those defined either as co-decision powers or as "not to be the responsibility of an authority's executive". This latter is a limited list, including quasi-judicial decisions on planning and licensing, and certain ceremonial, employment and legal decisions.

An elected mayor (in a mayor and cabinet system) also has the power to appoint up to nine councillors as members of a cabinet and to delegate powers, either to them as individuals, or to the Mayor and Cabinet committee, or to subcommittees of the Mayor and Cabinet committee. In practice, the mayor remains personally accountable, so most mayors have chosen to delegate to a very limited extent—if at all.

Local authorities in Britain remain administered by a permanent staff of chief officers led by a chief executive or chief operating officer.^[36] who are politically neutral bureaucrats. Their powers remain unaffected by the introduction of elected mayor. Senior officers continue to be appointed by a politically representative committee of councillors, and the mayor may not attempt to influence the decision as to who is appointed (except within the committee as a member of the committee). To maintain the staff's professional and political independence, the mayor (or any other member of the council) may not personally direct any member of staff. Accordingly, an elected mayor cannot really be accurately characterised as an executive mayor, as in parts of the US and certain other countries, but more as a semi-executive mayor.

Consultations took place in 12 English cities due to have referendums over the introduction of elected mayors, over what powers those mayors should have, and how they should be scrutinised.^[37]

Referendum results

As of October 2021, there have been 54 referendums on the question of changing executive arrangements to a model with an elected mayor. Referendums are triggered by council resolution, local petition or central government intervention. Of these, 17 have resulted in the establishment of a new mayoralty and 37 have been rejected by voters. Average "yes" vote is 45%. Typical turnout is around 30%, but has been as low as 10% and as high as 64%. The turnout is higher when the referendum coincides with another vote, such as an election.

There have been nine referendums on the question of removing the post of elected mayor. Four mayoral posts have been disestablished following a vote and five retained.

Two local authority mayors, those for Leicester and Liverpool, were created by city council resolution without holding a referendum.

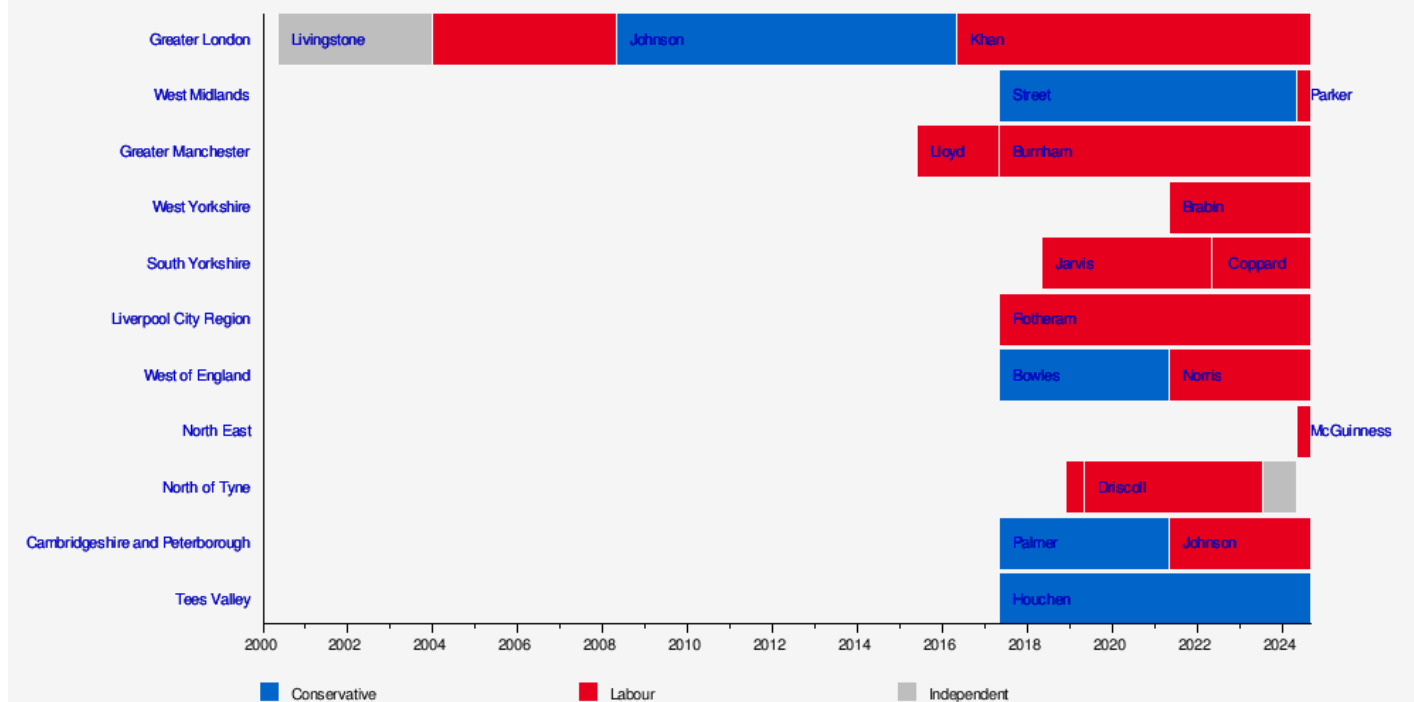
List of directly elected mayors

As of May 2024, there are 25 directly elected mayors in England.

Mayoralities covering more than one local authority

| Authority | Post | Type | Current mayor | Party | First election | Next election | Population (2020) ^[38] |
|---|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| <u>Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Nik Johnson</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2017</u> | 2025 | 859,800 |
| <u>East Midlands Combined County Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of the East Midlands</u> | <u>Combined county authority</u> | <u>Claire Ward</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2024 (inaugural election)</u> | 2028 | 1,363,000 |
| <u>Greater London Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of London</u> | <u>Greater London Authority</u> | <u>Sadiq Khan</u> | <u>Labour</u> | <u>2000</u> | 2028 | 8,547,000 |
| <u>Greater Manchester Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of Greater Manchester</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Andy Burnham</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2017</u> | 2028 | 2,848,300 |
| <u>Liverpool City Region Combined Authority</u> | <u>Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Steve Rotheram</u> | <u>Labour</u> | <u>2017</u> | 2028 | 1,564,000 |
| <u>North East Mayoral Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of the North East</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Kim McGuinness</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2024 (inaugural election)</u> | 2028 | 2,567,000 |
| <u>South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of South Yorkshire</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Oliver Coppard</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2018</u> | 2028 | 1,415,100 |
| <u>Tees Valley Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of the Tees Valley</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Ben Houchen</u> | <u>Conservative</u> | <u>2017</u> | 2028 | 677,200 |
| <u>West Midlands Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of the West Midlands</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Richard Parker</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2017</u> | 2028 | 2,939,900 |
| <u>West of England Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of the West of England</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Dan Norris</u> | <u>Labour</u> | <u>2017</u> | 2025 | 950,000 |
| <u>West Yorkshire Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of West Yorkshire</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>Tracy Brabin</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2021</u> | 2028 | 2,345,200 |
| <u>York and North Yorkshire Combined Authority</u> | <u>Mayor of York and North Yorkshire</u> | <u>Combined authority</u> | <u>David Skaith</u> | <u>Labour Co-op</u> | <u>2024 (inaugural election)</u> | 2028 | 820,500 |

Regional mayors in England



Mayoralties covering a single local authority

| Local authority | Post | Type | Current mayor | Party | Established | Next election | Population |
|--|---|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|
| Bedford Borough Council | Mayor of Bedford | Unitary authority | Tom Wootton | Conservative | 2002 | 2027 | 155,700 |
| Croydon London Borough Council | Mayor of Croydon | London borough | Jason Perry | Conservative | 2022 | 2026 | 386,710 |
| Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council | Mayor of Doncaster | Metropolitan borough | Ros Jones | Labour | 2002 | 2025 | 291,600 |
| Hackney London Borough Council | Mayor of Hackney | London borough | Caroline Woodley | Labour | 2002 | 2026 | 212,200 |
| Leicester City Council | Mayor of Leicester | Unitary authority | Peter Soulsby | Labour | 2011 | 2027 | 294,700 |
| Lewisham London Borough Council | Mayor of Lewisham | London borough | Brenda Dacres | Labour Co-op | 2002 | 2026 | 261,600 |
| Mansfield District Council | Mayor of Mansfield | Non-metropolitan district | Andy Abrahams | Labour | 2002 | 2027 | 100,600 |
| Middlesbrough Borough Council | Mayor of Middlesbrough | Unitary authority | Chris Cooke | Labour Co-op | 2002 | 2027 | 139,000 |
| Newham London Borough Council | Mayor of Newham | London borough | Rokhsana Fiaz | Labour Co-op | 2002 | 2026 | 249,500 |
| North Tyneside Council | Mayor of North Tyneside | Metropolitan borough | Norma Redfearn | Labour | 2002 | 2025 | 196,000 |
| Salford City Council | Mayor of Salford | Metropolitan borough | Paul Dennett | Labour | 2012 | 2028 | 229,000 |
| Tower Hamlets London Borough Council | Mayor of Tower Hamlets | London borough | Lutfur Rahman | Aspire | 2010 | 2026 | 220,500 |
| Watford Borough Council | Mayor of Watford | Non-metropolitan district | Peter Taylor | Liberal Democrats | 2002 | 2026 | 80,000 |

Proposed mayoralties and leaderships

| Authority | Post | Type | First election |
|--|--|---|---------------------------|
| Greater Lincolnshire Mayoral Combined County Authority | Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire | Mayoral County Combined Authority in Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, and North East Lincolnshire^[39] | 2025 (inaugural election) |
| Hull and East Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority | Mayor of Hull and East Yorkshire | Mayoral Combined Authority in Kingston-upon-Hull, and the East Riding of Yorkshire^[40] | 2025 (inaugural election) |
| Norfolk County Council | Leader of Norfolk County Council | County Deal in Norfolk, with an Elected Leader and not Mayor^[41] | 2025 (inaugural election) |
| Suffolk County Council | Leader of Suffolk County Council | County Deal in Suffolk, with an Elected Leader and not Mayor^[42] | 2025 (inaugural election) |

Cancelled proposals

| Authority | Post | Type | Cancellation |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Cornwall Council | Mayor of Cornwall | Mayoral Deal in Cornwall, which changes the Governance model of Cornwall Council from a Leader and Cabinet to a Mayor and Cabinet ^[43] | Cancelled April 2023 ^{[44][45]} |

Former mayoralities

Former mayoralities are:

| Local authority | Post | Type | Established | Disestablished |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Bristol City Council | Mayor of Bristol | Unitary authority | 2012 | 2024 |
| Copeland Borough Council | Mayor of Copeland | Non-metropolitan district | 2015 | 2023 |
| Hartlepool Borough Council | Mayor of Hartlepool | Unitary authority | 2002 | 2013 |
| Liverpool City Council | Mayor of Liverpool | Metropolitan borough | 2012 | 2023 |
| North of Tyne Combined Authority | Mayor of the North of Tyne | Combined authority | 2019 | 2024 |
| Stoke-on-Trent City Council | Mayor of Stoke-on-Trent | Unitary authority | 2002 | 2009 |
| Torbay Council | Mayor of Torbay | Unitary authority | 2005 | 2019 |

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External links

- Directory of current mayors (<http://www.citymayors.com/mayors/british-mayors.html>)
 - House of Commons Library Briefing Note (<https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05000>)
 - Arguments for elected mayors (http://www.citymayors.com/politics/uk_electedmayors2.html)
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 - Institute for Government mayoral pages (<http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/content/local-accountability>)
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