



Local Government Structure

The Background

Local government in Britain is structured in two contrasting ways. In Scotland, Wales and parts of England, a single tier "all purpose council" is responsible for all local authority functions (Unitary, Metropolitan or London Borough). The remainder of England has a two-tier system, in which two separate councils divide responsibilities between district and county councils. In brief, these are:

Single Tier Authorities

Wales: 22 **Unitary Authorities**
England: 36 **Metropolitan Authorities**

- West Midlands area: 7 authorities
- Merseyside area: 5 authorities
- Greater Manchester area: 10 authorities
- South Yorkshire area: 4 authorities
- West Yorkshire area: 5 authorities
- Tyne & Wear area: 5 authorities

33 **London Boroughs** (London also has the Greater London Authority)

47 **English Shire Unitary Authorities** (including Isles of Scilly)

Two-tier Authorities in England

34 County Councils
238 District Councils
410 Total Local Authorities in England and Wales

Revenue

Local authorities raise their income in a number of different ways, with the council tax only raising around 25% of total local authority revenue. The rest is made up of central government grants which, at around 48%, form the majority of local government revenue. The Non Domestic Rate is a charge to businesses which is set by central government and this raises about 25% of local authority revenue with the remainder being made up by charges for services and reserves. The list on the last page of this information sheet shows the responsibilities that each type of local authority has.

Local government change during the 1990s

England

In the early 1990s the structure of local government in Britain once again became a

subject of public debate.

The Government created the independent Local Government Commission (LGC) to look at the case for replacing the existing two-tier structure of county and district councils with a structure based on all-purpose unitary authorities (London and metropolitan England - which has a unitary structure - did not form part of the review). However, it was made clear that there was to be no national blueprint for reorganisation and decisions were to be made according to the needs of each local area.

Following debate and discussion in Parliament, between local authorities themselves, the local authority associations, and with widespread public consultation and opinion polling, the LGC concluded that a mixed system should be created. It recommended the creation of unitary authorities in some parts of the country and the retention of the existing two-tier system elsewhere. The Government accepted most of the Commission's recommendations. However, it was concerned that some large towns and cities with a cohesive civic identity would be better governed by a unitary authority. Many of these had been county boroughs until 1974 and had a significant need for economic and social regeneration.

As a result of these further reviews, the LGC recommended the creation of an additional eight unitary authorities.

The main changes resulting from the review process therefore were as follows:

- The abolition of the three "new" counties (Avon, Cleveland and Humberside) created in 1974 and their replacement with four unitary authorities in each case. Following the abolition of these county councils, revised arrangements were made for ceremonial functions (for example Lord Lieutenancy arrangements).
- The abolition of the Royal County of Berkshire and its replacement with six unitary authorities.

- The creation of 46 new unitary authorities in 22 counties, mostly with large towns and cities such as Bournemouth, Milton Keynes and Derby becoming all purpose authorities (see list over for new unitaries in England).

- The retention of the status quo in the remaining 12 counties. This was generally without change.

Wales

Wales on the other hand had a system of unitary local government established by the passing of the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994. Wales has 22 unitary authorities which came into existence on 1 April 1996. They are responsible for the complete range of local authority functions.

Further information on local government in Wales is available from the Welsh Local Government Association, Local Government House, Drake Walk, Cardiff CF1 4LG, tel 029 2046 8600.

NEW UNITARY AUTHORITY

COUNTY AREA

DATE OF CREATION

Isle of Wight	Isle of Wight	April 1995
Bath & NE Somerset	Avon	April 1996
City & County of Bristol	Avon	April 1996
East Riding of Yorkshire	Humberside	April 1996
Hartlepool	Cleveland	April 1996
Hull	Humberside	April 1996
Middlesbrough	Cleveland	April 1996
NE Lincolnshire	Humberside	April 1996
North Lincolnshire	Humberside	April 1996
North Somerset	Avon	April 1996
Redcar & Cleveland	Cleveland	April 1996
South Gloucestershire	Avon	April 1996
Stockton-on-Tees	Cleveland	April 1996
City of York	North Yorkshire	April 1996
Bournemouth	Dorset	April 1997
Brighton & Hove	East Sussex	April 1997
Darlington	Durham	April 1997
Derby	Derbyshire	April 1997
Leicester	Leicestershire	April 1997
Luton	Bedfordshire	April 1997
Milton Keynes	Buckinghamshire	April 1997
Poole	Dorset	April 1997
Portsmouth	Hampshire	April 1997
Rutland	Leicestershire	April 1997
Southampton	Hampshire	April 1997
Stoke-on-Trent	Staffordshire	April 1997
Swindon	Wiltshire	April 1997
Bracknell Forest	Berkshire	April 1998
West Berkshire	Berkshire	April 1998
Reading	Berkshire	April 1998
Slough	Berkshire	April 1998
Windsor & Maidenhead	Berkshire	April 1998
Wokingham	Berkshire	April 1998
Peterborough	Cambridgeshire	April 1998
Halton	Cheshire	April 1998
Warrington	Cheshire	April 1998
Plymouth	Devon	April 1998
Torbay	Devon	April 1998
Southend	Essex	April 1998
Thurrock	Essex	April 1998
Herefordshire	Hereford & Worcester	April 1998
Medway	Kent	April 1998
Blackburn with Darwen	Lancashire	April 1998
Blackpool	Lancashire	April 1998
Nottingham	Nottinghamshire	April 1998
Telford & Wrekin	Shropshire	April 1998

	Met/London* Authorities			Shire/Unitary Authorities		
	Joint Authorities	Met Councils	London Boroughs	District Councils	Unitary Authorities (England & Wales)	County Councils
Education		•	•		•	•
Housing		•	•	•	•	
Planning Applications		•	•	•	•	
Strategic Planning		•	•		•	•
Transport planning		•			•	•
Passenger Transport	•				•	•
Highways		•	•		•	•
Fire	•				(1) •	•
Social Services		•	•		•	•
Libraries		•	•		•	•
Leisure & Recreation		•	•	•	•	
Waste Collection		•	•	•	•	
Waste Disposal	•				•	•
Environmental Health		•	•	•	•	
Revenue Collection		•	•	•	•	

1. Joint fire authorities operate in Counties with Unitary Authorities in them. These are combined fire authorities, there are three combined fire authorities for Wales.

***Greater London Authority (GLA) functions:** Transport: control the underground and London buses, taxis, DLR and most main roads (the London Boroughs remain the highway & traffic authorities for 95% of roads). Economic Development: attract new investment. Environment: work with the boroughs on air quality, waste etc. Planning: set the overall strategic framework for the development of London (the boroughs will continue to deal with local planning matters). Fire: the London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority is responsible for London's fire service (9 members are drawn from the GLA). Culture: play a leading part in developing London's tourism, culture and sport. Health: has a duty to promote the improvement of the health of Londoners.