

3. Devolution

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Government is seeking urgent responses from Councils as to whether they want to join its Priority Programme, which is a pathway to the creation of Strategic Authorities, with mayoral elections in May 2026. Government is giving councils the opportunity to put forward their preferred devolution option either as part of this priority programme or at a later stage. It has made it clear that those councils unable to reach a clear decision on devolution that satisfies the terms of the government’s white paper within an undefined reasonable time frame will be subject to a ministerial directive.

The Council has several options to consider. Following the recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 January 2024, this report builds on previous reports and presentations to members to provide evidence and data on each option to enable Council to have an informed debate and indicate the preferred way forward on devolution.

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COUNCIL



Report subject	Devolution
Meeting date	15 January 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>On 16 December, Government released its Devolution White Paper which clearly sets out its ambition for universal coverage of Strategic Authorities in England, with or without mayors, “to ensure citizens benefit from devolution and to ensure the effective running of public services.” This will have implications for BCP Council and its residents now and into the future.</p> <p>Government is seeking urgent responses from Councils as to whether they want to join its Priority Programme, which is a pathway to the creation of Strategic Authorities, with mayoral elections in May 2026. Government is giving councils the opportunity to put forward their preferred devolution option either as part of this priority programme or at a later stage. It has made it clear that those councils unable to reach a clear decision on devolution that satisfies the terms of the government’s white paper within an undefined reasonable time frame will be subject to a ministerial directive.</p> <p>The Council has several options to consider. Following the recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 January 2024, this report builds on previous reports and presentations to members to provide evidence and data on each option to enable Council to have an informed debate and indicate the preferred way forward on devolution.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>Council considers the evidence in this report and indicates:</p> <p>1 Whether BCP Council should apply to participate in the Priority Programme</p> <p>2 If so, what the preferred geography should be</p>
Reason for recommendations	To determine the Council’s preferred way forward in the devolution process for the benefit of our residents, through open, transparent and evidence-based debate.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Millie Earl, Leader of the Council
Corporate Director	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive
Report Authors	Graham Farrant, Chief Executive Isla Reynolds, Director of Marketing, Communications and Policy Glynn Barton, Chief Operations Officer Chris Shephard, Head of Operations Strategy & Partnerships
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

English Devolution White Paper – Strategic Authorities Universal Coverage

1. On 16 December 2024 the Government released its [Devolution White Paper](#), which builds on the approach from the previous Government, aiming to accelerate the proposed shift of power from Westminster, and to create consistent devolved strategic powers across England.
2. The White Paper sets out the Government's ambition to enshrine in law the creation of Strategic Authorities, covering the whole of England. It states that Strategic Authorities "*should be a number of councils working together, covering areas that people recognise and work in*". It will put a framework into legislation setting out the powers that go with each type of authority the most far-reaching of which will be for those with Mayors.
3. Government is seeking urgent responses from Councils as to whether they want to join its Priority Programme, which is a pathway to the creation of Strategic Authorities with mayoral elections in May 2026. Government is requesting that councils put forward their preferred devolution option either as part of this priority programme, or at a later stage. It has made it clear that those councils unable to reach a clear decision on devolution that satisfies the terms of the government's white paper within a reasonable time frame will be subject to a ministerial directive where government will effectively make the decision for them. Ministers have subsequently clarified that their preference is for local determination of the geography and timing, rather than ministerial direction. However, the White Paper is clear that they do intend to provide full coverage for Strategic Authorities across the country, although the ultimate timescale is not determined.
4. The Council has several options to consider. Following the recommendation from Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 January 2024, this report builds on previous reports and presentations to members to provide evidence and data on each option, enabling Council to have an informed debate and determine the preferred way forward on devolution.

Strategic Authorities

5. The White Paper states: *“The Government will create in law the concept of a Strategic Authority. All Strategic Authorities will belong to one of the following levels:*

Foundation Strategic Authorities: *these include non-mayoral combined authorities and combined county authorities automatically, and any local authority designated as a Strategic Authority without a Mayor.*

Mayoral Strategic Authorities: *the Greater London Authority, all Mayoral Combined Authorities and all Mayoral Combined County Authorities will automatically begin as Mayoral Strategic Authorities. Those who meet specified eligibility criteria may be designated as **Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities**. This unlocks further devolution, most notably an Integrated Settlement.*

The government’s strong preference is for partnerships that bring more than one local authority together over a large geography. In exceptional circumstances the Secretary of State will have the power to designate an individual local authority as a Foundation Strategic Authority only. Our ambition remains for all parts of England to ultimately have a Mayoral (and eventually Established Mayoral) Strategic Authority”.

6. The executive summary of the White Paper also says:

“However, in order to ensure that citizens across England benefit from devolution, and to ensure the effective running of public services, we will legislate for a ministerial directive. This will allow the creation of those Strategic Authorities where local leaders have, after due time has been allowed, not been able to make progress.

The detailed paper goes on to give a bit more detail on that:

“In order to ensure a complete national layer of Strategic Authorities is in place to devolve further powers to in future, we will legislate for a ministerial directive, which will enable the government to create Strategic Authorities in any remaining places where local leaders in that region have not been able to agree how to access devolved powers. Our commitment to working in partnership holds firm, and so the government will limit its use of this power to instances when other routes have been exhausted. We will ensure that the ministerial directive is used to conclude the process where there is majority support, or the formation is essential in completing the roll out of Strategic Authorities in England.

“The government will work collaboratively with local government to deliver on the ambition of universal coverage of Strategic Authorities in England”.

English Devolution White Paper – Powers and Co-ordination

7. The government will put a framework into legislation setting out the powers that go with each type of authority. The most far-reaching and flexible powers will be for Mayoral Strategic Authorities.
8. There is also an ambition to reform and join up public services including:
 - Police and Crime Commissioner duties
 - Fire and Rescue Authorities

- Integrated Care Partnerships and Integrated Care Boards
 - Plus, alignment of boundaries for these plus probation, job centres and local authorities.
9. Government also makes it clear that local government will be re-organised
- "Where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality public services."*
10. This does not affect BCP Council as local government re-organisation has already recently been completed and our scale is significant with an estimated population of 404,050. A number of other unitary councils which are smaller in size have received letters indicating a need for them to undertake local government reorganisation to increase their scale towards the target population of 500,000.

English Devolution White Paper – Key Areas for Influence and Control

11. Government also proposes “areas of competence” for a Strategic Authority:
- “The following list should be considered as areas where Strategic Authorities should have a mandate to act strategically to drive growth as well as support the shaping of public services, where strategic level coordination adds value:*
- *Transport and local infrastructure*
 - *Skills and employment support*
 - *Housing and strategic planning*
 - *Economic development and regeneration*
 - *Environment and climate change*
 - *Health, wellbeing and public service reform*
 - *Public safety”*

It has been clarified through discussion with MHCLG civil servants that this is not intended to take direct control of council services in these areas but is intended to reflect the strategic level of competence, not local service delivery.

English Devolution White Paper – Scale and Geography

12. When agreeing geographies the Government will consider the following principles:
- **Scale:** Strategic Authorities - the default assumption is for a combined population of 1.5 million or above
 - **Economies:** Strategic Authorities focus on functional economic areas, travel-to-work patterns and local labour markets.
 - **Contiguity:** Any proposed geography must be contiguous across its constituent councils – there can be no geographical gaps between member councils
 - **No ‘devolution islands’:** Geographies must not create devolution ‘islands’ where a council or small area is not part of surrounding devolved areas.

- **Delivery:** Geographies should ensure the effective delivery of key functions including Spatial Development Strategies, Local Transport Plans and Get Britain Working Plans.
- **Alignment:** Promote alignment between devolution and other public sector boundaries.
- **Identity:** Local identity plays a key role in enabling Strategic Authorities to be held to account.

English Devolution White Paper – Devolution Framework Summary Table

13. Government has also laid out at 3.10 in the White Paper a table of functions that will and will not be included (and funded) for the different types of authorities. This can be reviewed at Appendix A. For example, Established Mayoral Authorities only will get access to a multi-departmental, long term integrated funding settlement, Mayoral Authorities and Established Mayoral Authorities will get access to a long-term investment fund with an agreed allocation, but Foundation Authorities will get access to neither.

Devolution Options

Arrangements previously explored

14. Since the previous Government set out its plans for devolution, the Council has considered several options detailed in various reports and presentations, including:
- a Cabinet report ‘Exploring the options for devolution to BCP Council’ in November 2022
 - ‘Response to Government Pro Forma on Devolution’, presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 23 September 2024
 - A report and ‘devolution options’ presentation for Overview and Scrutiny Board 6 January 2025

Links to these can be found in the background documents section of this paper.

15. Recognising that devolution is a complex and rapidly developing picture, officers have continued to keep informal channels open across options. However, the publication of the White Paper has given rise to a new emphasis on pace and the need to determine a geography on a pre-determined larger scale with a minimum population of 1.5m set out. There may be exceptions allowed to this scale, but that would need a clear rationale.

Meeting with Minister – Baroness Taylor

16. The Leader and Chief Executive met with Baroness Taylor, Parliamentary Under-secretary of State (Lords Minister for Housing and Local Government), along with Leaders and Chief Executives from the three Heart of Wessex unitary authorities on 7 January 2025. The discussion focussed on whether those local authorities would be in a position to submit a proposal for a Mayoral Strategic Authority by Friday 10 January 2025. Key points arising, in addition to those set out in the White Paper, were:

- The current framework of powers is the minimum, not the ceiling, for devolved powers and government expects to rapidly increase the powers and functions that are devolved to Strategic Authorities once they are set up and functioning.
- The Minister commented that the Heart of Wessex, including BCP Council was supported by MHCLG as a sensible geography, but she noted that it was up to each local authority to determine what works to best effect for their communities. We told the Minister that we were looking at options involving the Heart of Wessex and Hampshire and Solent and she was content with that.
- The Council for Nations and Regions is likely to be a key forum for the future and this would include the Mayors for each devolved area.
- The Minister confirmed the timescale as follows:

Jan 2025 - engagement and seeking confirmation by 10 January, not a formal decision which comes after consultation etc.

Jan - March 2025 Government-led consultation processes to ensure government can meet its statutory tests and to relieve Local Authorities of the consultation commitments. This allows the local authority to formally respond to the consultation. The consultation is not looking for a yes/no, but looking to assess the possible benefits of the options presented

April – July 2025 - Ministerial decisions to proceed with specified areas

The following timetable is deduced from other engagement with MHCLG to lead to a May 2026 election for the mayor:

August – September 2025: finalise proposals and all affected Councils to formally consent to the Statutory Instrument.

September 2025 - February 2026: statutory process through Parliament.

February – March 2026: Institutions established

May 2026 - Mayoral elections.

17. Regarding the BCP Council position, Baroness Taylor confirmed that she believed that there are huge early opportunities and that her strong advice would be to be part of the Priority Programme. The government was proposing to adopt ministerial directive powers which could be used to push areas into an appropriate area arrangement, but she would really urge a local recommendation to come forward as her preference. She also commented that she would accept the delay until next Thursday for a letter from the Leader given the political complexities of BCP Council.

Since the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting on 6 January, further responses from MHCLG and ministers have included the following responses in a webinar on 9 January 2025 (Background paper: Key Cities 'Notes of the Ministerial Webinar'):

In order to be a part of the priority programme, do all upper tier authorities in an area have to ‘make the ask’, or is the majority enough to be considered?

Response: The final point of consent for establishing a strategic authority is when the consent is given by councils to the statutory instrument that establishes that body – all of the constituent members have to provide that consent. So in the case of a combined authority, it would mean all the councils within that area, and in a combined county authority, it would be all of the upper tier local authorities in that area.

How will the priority programme be run?

Response: The priority programme is about extending mayoral devolution and as such, current mayoral institutions are not in scope. Those in the process of discussing devolution without a mayor are invited to be on the programme provided they are pursuing a mayoral structure. There is no limit on the number of areas to be on the priority list. (Note: this contradicts earlier indications that capacity is limited and may constrain the number of Strategic Authorities included in the Priority Programme).

On Mayoral powers: is there potential for upper tier local authority responsibilities to be transferred to Mayors?

Response: There is scope to expand some functions at strategic authority level. For example, in highways, oversight of the Key Route Network may be extended to Mayors. But overall there are no plans to move functions wholesale up to the strategic level. Local authorities will have the freedom to discharge their responsibilities.

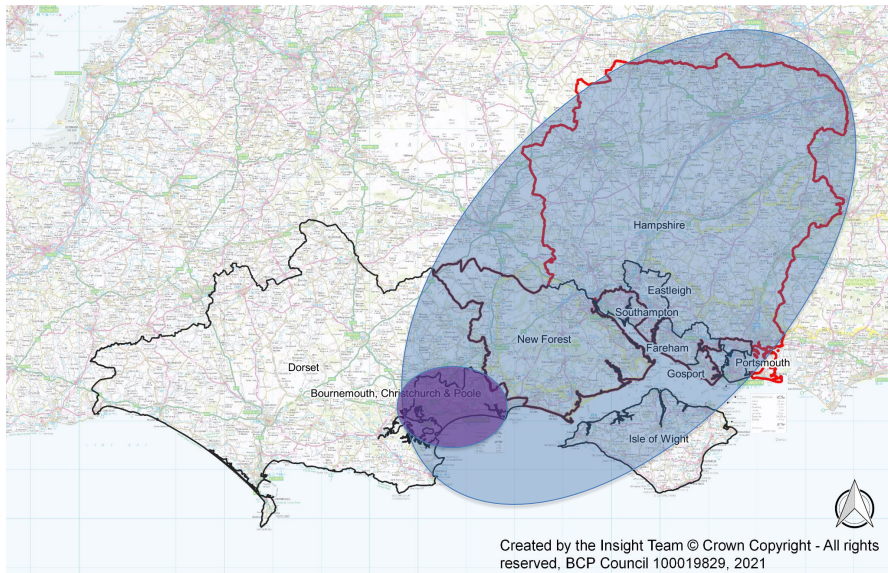
18. In addition, the Leader has requested an urgent meeting with Jim McMahon, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution in the United Kingdom, with our five MPs, to confirm the parameters in so far as they specifically relate to the BCP area and our geographical complexity.

Options for Devolution that have been explored:

19. This section will set out each of the possible options that have been explored in recent years and set out key strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. These were summarised in a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 January.
20. **Pan Hampshire including BCP** – this proposal extended the current Hampshire and Solent area to include the BCP area and was developed during 2022 with an analysis provided in the Cabinet report of November 2022. Whilst discussions were positive, it was not a natural fit because of the different government regions involved and in early 2023 the Hampshire Chief Executive advised that, having spoken to DLUHC, the general consensus was a devolution deal with Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight, excluding BCP Council, was simpler and so they intended to pursue this option. The BCP Council Leader at time agreed (Jan 2023), and we have not had a Leader-to-Leader conversation since then, until Hampshire expressed their renewed interest in late December 2024.

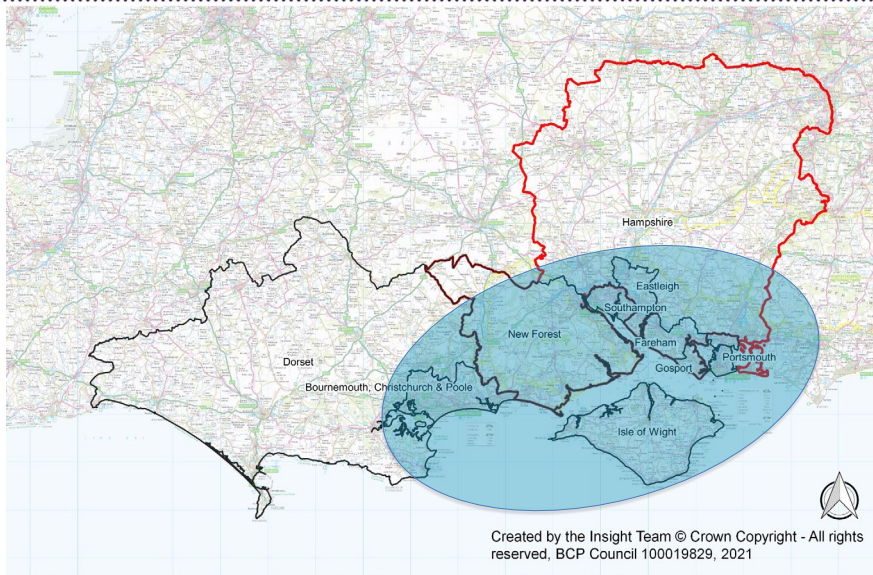
21. We have been advised that MHCLG civil servants would support a simpler regional and administrative geography which did not cross regional boundaries. However, they have emphasised that they want to see local determination of geography so would not rule out the discussion with Hampshire and Solent despite the administrative complexities which include the fact that the BCP Council area only covers half of our PCC and Police force area, and half of the ICB area. We also have different public service boundaries for Fire and Ambulance services.

Devolution Options Explored: Pan -Hampshire incl. BCP

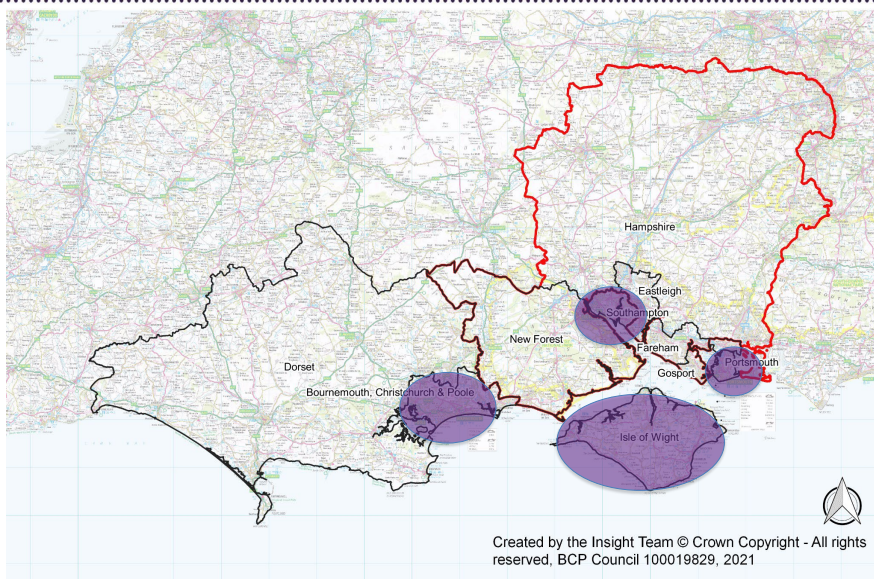


22. **Central South and the Solent Unitary Authorities.** Central South, as outlined in the Cabinet report of November 2022, is a business-led construct led by Business South that is more akin to a regional partnership. The proposed geography included Portsmouth, Southampton, the Isle of Wight and those district councils which lie in Hampshire, but which are between those authorities, including Gosport, Eastleigh, and New Forest DC, plus Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole within its geography. Although some discussions took place in relation to building a devolution proposal for this area it was recognised that it would split the Hampshire County Council area and it would disrupt other public service boundaries such as Fire and Rescue, Police and NHS. The concept did not gain formal traction between the councils and with government. All parties recognised that it was too politically and geographically complex and subsequently Hampshire and Solent councils confirmed they were working on their own deal to cover the whole of the Hampshire county area.
23. Similarly, discussions were had around a devolution arrangement between just BCP Council and the three Solent unitary authorities of Southampton, Portsmouth, Isle of Wight, and excluding the district councils between, but for the same reasons this did not gain formal traction. Discussions with colleagues from the Councils involved concluded in July 2023 with no consensus to pursue this option. With the current White Paper requirement for contiguity, this option is no longer possible as the authorities involved are not physically linked by geography.

Devolution Options Explored: Central South

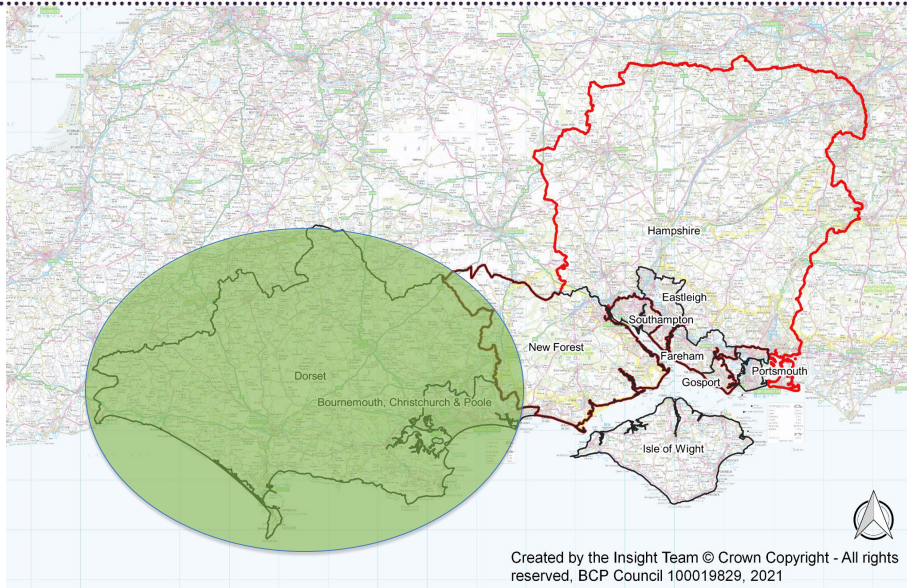


Devolution Options Explored: Solent unitary authorities

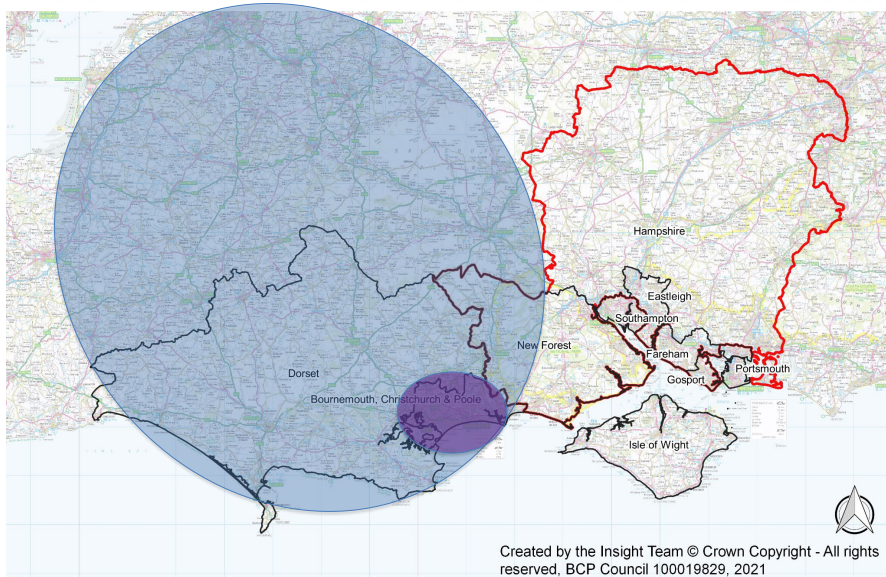


24. **BCP & Dorset “Pan-Dorset”** – From January 2023 the focus turned westwards with discussions ongoing with Dorset Council and neighbours with the focus on either BCP alone, a BCP and Dorset arrangement, or as part of the Heart of Wessex configuration. Dorset Council have expressed their preference to be part of Heart of Wessex, and the pan-Dorset option would no longer meet the population criteria outlined in the latest Government White Paper.

Devolution Options Explored: pan -Dorset county area



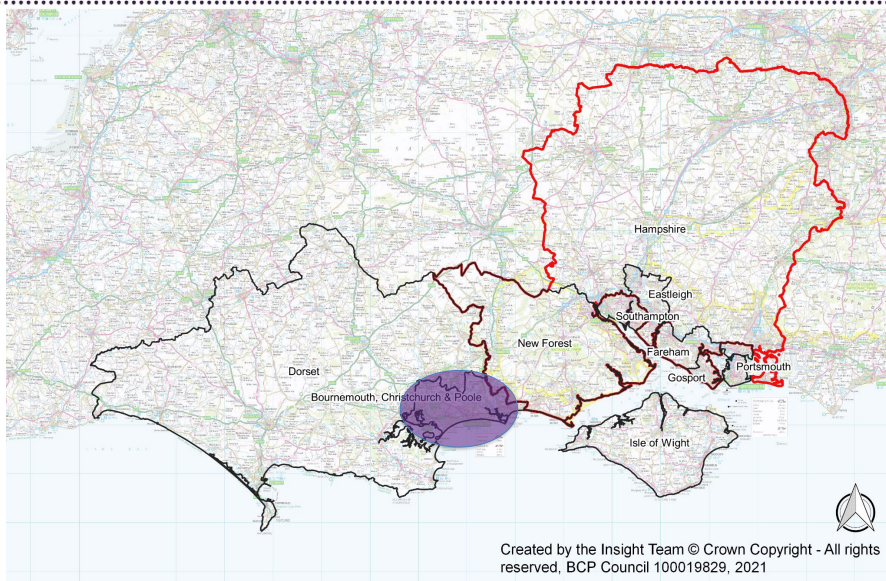
Devolution Options Explored: Heart of Wessex



25. However, in July 2024, the Council (along with all Councils) received a letter from Angela Rayner MP, asking Councils to preference their devolution geography, and whether they wanted a mayor.
26. **BCP Only** - On 23 September 2024, having discussed the options and the evidence, Overview and Scrutiny Board recommended that the Council respond to Government stating its preference for a BCP Council only, non-mayoral approach to devolution. In recognition of this recommendation the Leader submitted an expression of interest on this basis and consequently, the Pan-

Dorset discussion was not pursued further at that stage, although informal discussions continued around a Heart of Wessex option.

Devolution Options Explored: BCP only



27. This option does not meet the new criteria outlined in December's White Paper for devolved areas to have a combined population of 1.5 million or above. While MHCLG has not explicitly rejected this proposal, it does not meet the new White Paper criteria of a 1.5M population or a region bigger than a single local authority.

Pan-Regional Partnership(s)

28. BCP Council is a member of the [Great South West](#) Pan-Regional Partnership. This is not a devolution arrangement, but a private-public sector partnership that enables BCP Council to be represented in a collective voice with Government which is funded from central government and subscriptions from local authorities in the area.
29. The Great South West partnership is committed to driving investment, delivering major projects, developing a testbed for new ideas and ensuring the Great South West's opportunities are understood by the Government.
- The Great South West covers Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Plymouth, Torbay, Somerset, Dorset and BCP and is focused on
- Shifting the needle on UK economic growth
 - Driving the UK economy forward
 - Leading in globally critical sectors for the UK
30. The Great South West Partnership Board has representatives from business, universities, councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships. Transport, energy, manufacturing, agriculture, marine and space sectors are all represented. The Board works with government and champions the region on a national and international level.

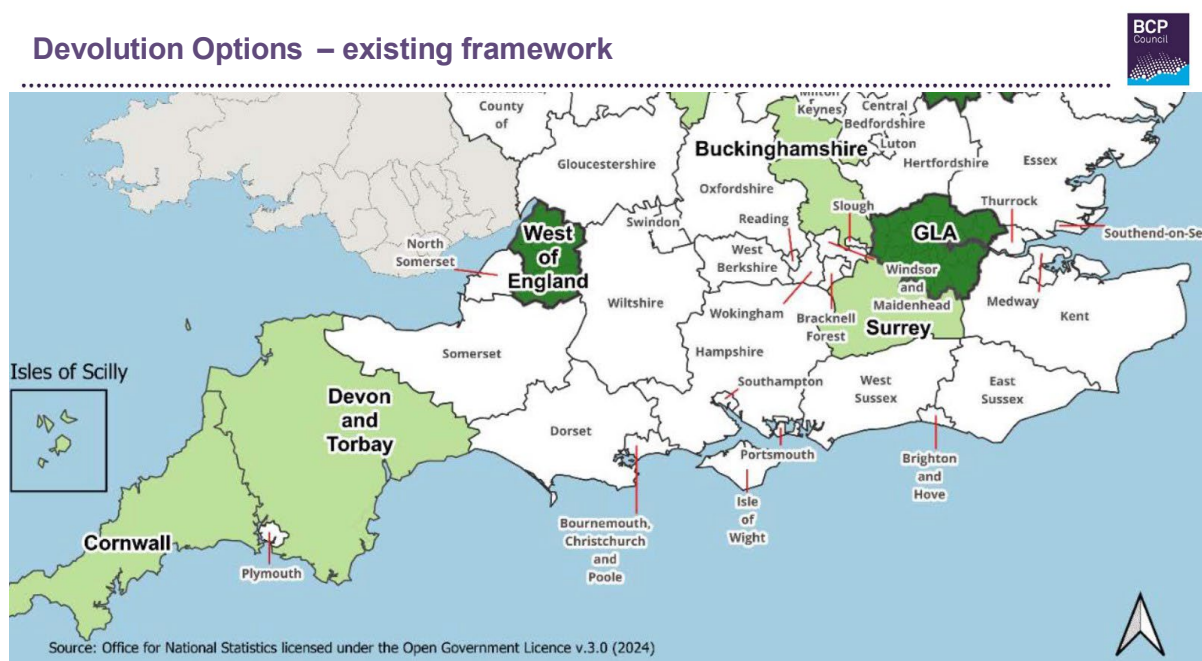
31. In the October 2024 budget Government announced that it is "minded to" end funding for Pan-Regional Partnerships (PRPs) at the end of the financial year in March 2025. BCP Council has written to Government as part of its consultation on the matter to express its support for the partnership. However, this area is not currently being considered for a devolution bid.

Devolution Options 2025

Existing Framework

32. In summary, all previous options have been reviewed and many of them have been discounted because they either don't meet the new criteria (contiguity etc) or the other authorities involved have expressed interest in being aligned to other options.
33. Figure 1 shows a map of the existing framework. There are currently discussions as a result of the new criteria in the White Paper happening across many areas just as they are here, including Cornwall, Devon, Torbay and Plymouth, Hampshire and Solent, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire, and North Somerset. In many areas across the country there are a core of local authorities whose ambitions and geography align, but there are often outliers either within that geography or on the periphery.

Figure 1:



Devolution Options Appraisal

34. Recognising that all previous options have been reviewed against the new criteria (i.e. no devolution islands, a population of 1.5M or above, no single local authority areas) and discounted, there are now the following options for consideration:

- Option 1: Wait for next stage of the process and not join the Priority Programme. Determine at a later stage whether to proactively seek to join a neighbouring Strategic Authority or wait until a government directive is issued to join a Strategic Authority in due course.
- Option 2: BCP-only: Submit a proposal to join the priority programme for a BCP-focussed geography, incorporating parts or all of one or more neighbouring authorities.
- Option 3: Hampshire and Solent: Seek to join the Hampshire and Solent Strategic Authority as part of the Government's Priority Programme to develop a Mayoral Strategic Authority for this area in May 2026
- Option 4: Heart of Wessex: Seek to join the Heart of Wessex Strategic Authority as part of the Government's Priority Programme to develop a Mayoral Strategic Authority for this area in May 2026.

35. Appendix B has a series of comparator data tables which can be used to aid the analysis of each option.

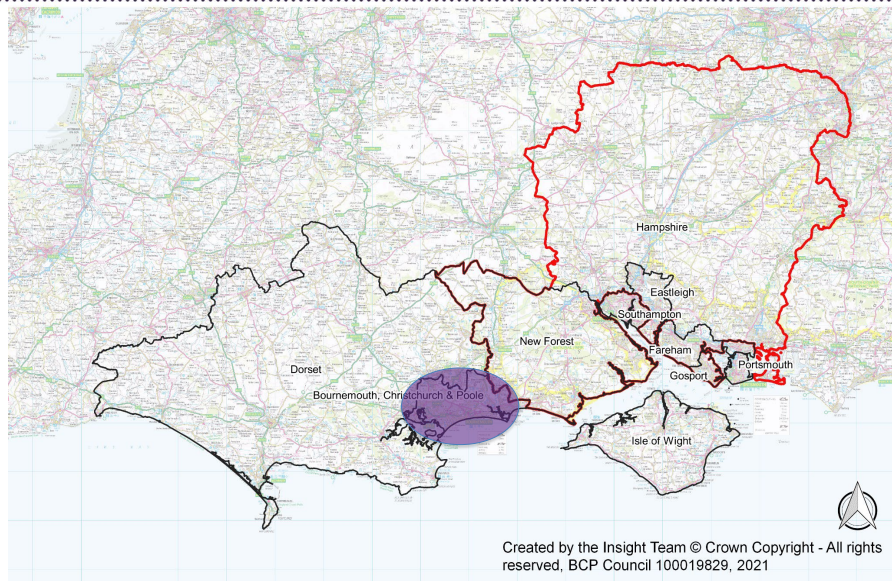
Option 1: Wait for the next stage of the process

Wait for the next stage of the process and not join the priority programme. Unlike other authorities, BCP Council does not need to consider Local Government reorganisation, nor does it have the issue of elections in May 2026. Examples of the strengths and opportunities of this proposal include the opportunity to learn from the Priority Programme first wave, and more time to seek the views of the public. Examples of weaknesses and threats of the proposal include the likelihood of missing out on the opportunity to shape the agenda of the Strategic Authority and missing out on any short term future funding and investment that might come with the priority programme.

Option 2: BCP Only

36. As previously noted earlier in this report, this option does not meet the new population criteria outlined in the White Paper for devolved areas to have a combined population of 1.5 million or above. Even so, the Council could choose to pursue this option and seek to persuade government on the unsuitability of BCP Council to join either of the two devolution arrangements that offer access to the Priority Programme (Heart of Wessex or Hampshire and Solent). It is difficult to assess the likely outcome of this approach, but previous efforts have not been successful.

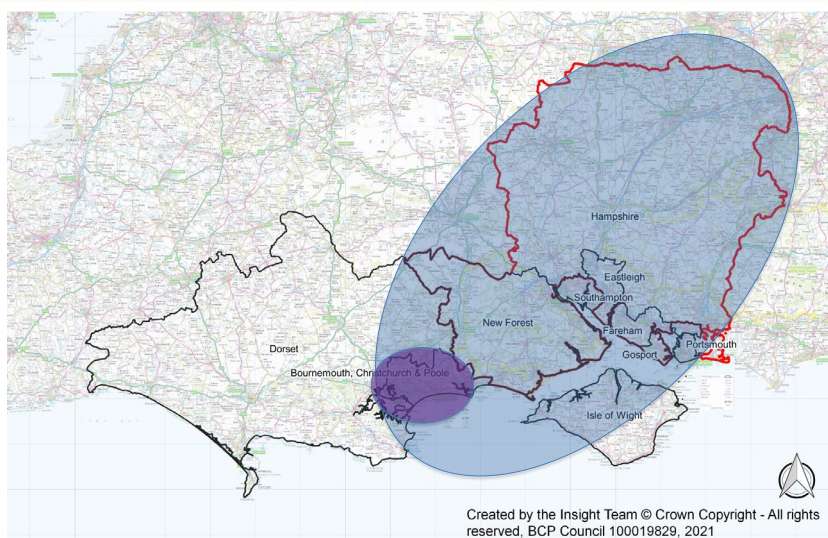
37. The strengths of a BCP-only option are detailed in the supporting document to the expression of interest, submitted to the Government in the autumn (see Background Papers). These include being able to focus investment and powers on the issues and challenges we face within the economic geography of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole.



Option 3: Hampshire and Solent

Joining the Priority Programme with the Hampshire and Solent area would meet the White Paper's criteria for population size and geographical contiguity, but not for simple administrative areas. This would particularly become an issue if the Strategic Authority sought to control wider public services which are organised on a regional basis as the BCP area is in the South West region and Hampshire and Solent authorities are in the South region.

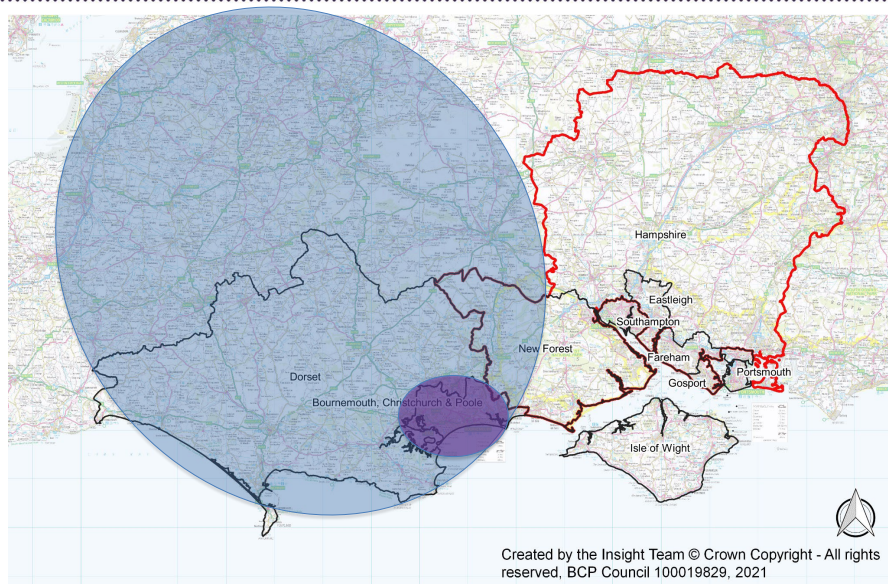
Examples of the strengths and opportunities of this proposal include the previous proposal which provides a strong starting point from which to build, a strong global destination message with strong economic and education assets and a strong voice with government. Weaknesses include the need to extend the current Hampshire and Solent proposal to include BCP, particularly around transport and skills, where our needs are different and the likely need for significant local government reorganisation in Hampshire.



Option 4: Heart of Wessex

38. Joining the Priority Programme with the Heart of Wessex area would meet the White Paper's criteria for population size, geographical contiguity and simple administrative areas. The BCP area would provide many of the missing ingredients in the Heart of Wessex proposal (3 universities, airport, port, centre of urban growth).
39. However, there are few similarities between BCP Council, and the other areas involved, with BCP Council covering a densely populated urban conurbation, large, concentrated population and focus for infrastructure, education and economic activity compared to the other more rural authorities. The largest town in the Wessex area, outside of BCP, is Taunton with a population of 62,000. This proposal builds on the regional alignment of public services and previous working with the Dorset LEP on strategic economic opportunities, and provides space for housing and employment sites along relevant transport corridors as well as the opportunity to improve those under-developed transport corridors. However, the area is predominately rural with potentially very different needs and challenges, coupled with a lack of existing business and commercial relationships.

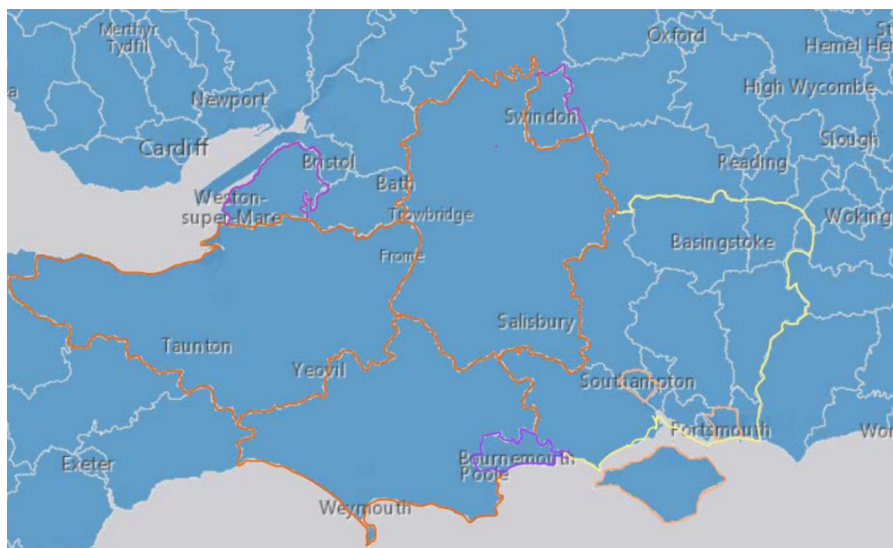
Devolution Options: Heart of Wessex incl. BCP



40. Figure 5 shows the boundaries for both Heart of Wessex and Hampshire and Solent

Figure 5:

Devolution Options



Heart of Wessex:
4-6 UA's

Hampshire and Solent:
3 UA's
10 DC's
1 CC

Existing Regional Links

41. Existing regional links across the two options shows (Figure 6) how the administrative boundaries are simplified in a Heart of Wessex proposal and are more complex in a Hampshire and Solent proposal, primarily because of the

historical links into the South-West region which have been built up over the last 50 years.

Figure 6:

Existing regional links	
Hampshire and Solent: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central South economic area (led by Southampton University) ▪ Transport infrastructure M 27/M3/SW Rail • FCERM links – Christchurch Bay • Some planning and mineral links ▪ Historical (pre-1974 LGR) connections 	Heart of Wessex/South West <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government region – SW (all Depts, agencies) • LGA – SW region • Professional groups (CEX's, DCS, DASS, Libraries) • SW Councils (and Leader's network) • SW Resilience networks inc. military and LRF • South Western Ambulance Service • Health and Public Health – SW region • Dorset Police and Probation – SW region • Western Gateway sub-national transport body • Great SW pan-regional partnership • Local Enterprise Partnership (pan-Dorset) • Chamber of Commerce & Industry (pan-Dorset) • Dorset Heaths Partnership • Poole Harbour Nutrients Scheme



Business Views

42. Working with Dorset Chamber of Commerce, the four Business Improvement Districts and Destination Management Board, an informal survey with a small sample of businesses was conducted between 9 January and 13th January 2025. Businesses were given two options either Heart of Wessex or Hampshire and Solent.
43. Details from the Dorset Chamber of Commerce are included in a report at Appendix D, with the summary being that there is overwhelming support for the Hampshire and Solent option from these businesses. However, at the time of writing, early data from other business sources shows responses from the other partners are more varied, with greater support emerging for the Wessex proposal.

Summary of financial implications

44. Depending on the preferred option, there could be an impact on BCP Council's access to funding via the devolution process, but the details of this are unclear at this time.

Summary of legal implications

45. Depending on the preferred option, there may be future legal implications, which will be worked through as part of the process.

Summary of human resources implications

46. Depending on the preferred option and ultimate devolution outcome, there may be some implications for people and posts. Appropriate assessment of the human resources impact would be made when more detail was available.

Summary of sustainability impact

47. There are no sustainability impacts of this report.

Summary of public health implications

48. There are no public health impacts of this report.

Summary of equality implications

49. An EIA would be prepared once Council indicated a preferred route for devolution.

Summary of risk assessment

50. The risks are identified within the options appraisal of this paper.

Background papers

- [Exploring the options for devolution to BCP Council](#), Cabinet report, 23 November 2022
- [Response to Government Pro Forma on Devolution](#), presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 23 September 2023
- Devolution Options, report to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 January 2025
- Devolution Options, presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 January 2025
- Key Cities Notes from MHCLG Webinar on 9 January 2025
- Supporting information to Expression of Interest EOI BCP supporting doc
- [English Devolution White Paper](#), 16 December 2024

Appendices

Appendix A: English Devolution White Paper Table of Functions

Appendix B: [Comparator data tables](#)

Appendix C: BCP Economic Assets table and Population Heatmap

Appendix D: Business views report, Dorset Chamber of Commerce

Devolution White Paper link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-devolution-white-paper-power-and-partnership-foundations-for-growth/english-devolution-white-paper>

Summary table Key :

(**) refers to functions for which funding will be included in Integrated Settlements for Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities

(^) refers to functions which apply to Combined and Combined County Authorities only

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Funding and investment			
Access to a multi-departmental, long-term integrated funding settlement**			X
Long-term investment fund, with an agreed annual allocation		X	X
Removal of gateway review from investment fund, after Gateway One complete			X
Ability to introduce mayoral precepting on council tax^		X	X
Consolidation of local growth and place funding in a single pot**	X	X	X
Strategic leadership			
A statutory duty to produce Local Growth Plans		X	X
Membership of the Council of Nations and Regions		X	X
Membership of the Mayoral Data Council		X	X
Transport and local infrastructure			
Local Transport Authority and public transport functions, including bus franchising and responsibility for an area-wide Local Transport Plan	X	X	X
Simplification and consolidation of local transport funding**	X	X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Removal of certain Secretary of State consents, e.g. on lane rental schemes		X	X
Duty to establish a Key Route Network on the most important local roads^		X	X
Mayoral Power of Direction over use of constituent authority powers on the Key Route Network^		X	X
Priority for strategic rail engagement (including mayoral partnerships) with Great British Railways	X	X	X
Statutory role in governing, managing, planning, and developing the rail network		X	X
An option for greater control over local rail stations		X	X
A 'right to request' further rail devolution			X
Priority for support to deliver multi-modal ticketing			X
A clear, strategic role in the decarbonisation of the local bus fleet	X	X	X
Active Travel England support for constituent authority capability^	X	X	X
Formal partnership with National Highways		X	X
Skills and employment support			
Joint ownership of the Local Skills Improvement Plan model, with Employer Representative Bodies	X	X	X
Devolution of the core Adult Skills Fund	X		
Devolution of non-apprenticeship adult skills functions through a consolidated skills funding pot**		X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Central convening of youth careers provision including greater flexibility for Careers hubs		X	X
A clear role in relation to 16-19 education and training		X	X
Responsibility for developing local Get Britain Working Plans	X	X	X
Devolution of supported employment funding**	X	X	X
Co-design of future employment support that is additional to core Jobcentre Plus provision		X	X
Delegated delivery or commissioning of employment support that is additional to core Jobcentre Plus provision			X
Alignment of Jobcentre Plus boundaries with Strategic Authorities			X
Housing and strategic planning			
A duty to produce a Spatial Development Strategy	X	X	X
Strategic development management powers (once the Spatial Development Strategy is in place)		X	X
Ability to raise a Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy to fund strategic infrastructure (once the Spatial Development Strategy is in place)		X	X
Ability to make Mayoral Development Orders		X	X
Ability to establish Mayoral Development Corporations		X	X
Homes England compulsory purchase powers (held concurrently)	X	X	X
Devolution of wider grant funding to support regeneration and housing delivery**		X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Ability to set the strategic direction of any future programme to support affordable housing provision in their area			X
Strategic Place Partnership with Homes England		X	X
Support to establish a public sector land commission			X
Economic development and regeneration			
Partnership working with Department for Science, Industry and Technology and UK Research and Innovation to explore opportunities for closer long-term collaboration in strengthening local research and innovation capacity	X	X	X
Develop joint innovation action plans with Innovate UK to shape long-term strategies and investments		X	X
Embed UK Research and Innovation lead points of contact for enhanced collaborative working on innovation with Mayoral Strategic Authorities that are committed to work collaboratively on innovation		X	X
Responsibility as the accountable body for the delivery of Growth Hubs	X	X	X
Devolution of Growth Hubs funding**			X
A Strategic Partnership with the Department for Business and Trade focused on domestic growth, exports, investment, and delivery of local growth priorities.		X	X
Partnership working with Department for Culture, Media and Sport Arm's Length Bodies to maximise culture, heritage, and sport spending in place	X	X	X
Environment and climate change			
Devolution of retrofit funding this parliament subject to a successful transition period (see 3.7)**			X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
Heat network zoning coordination role	X	X	X
Coordinating local energy planning to support development of regional network energy infrastructure	X	X	X
Green jobs and skills coordination role	X	X	X
A strategic role on net zero in collaboration with government, including on Great British Energy's Local Power Plan and Warm Homes Plan	X	X	X
Responsibility for coordinating delivery and monitoring of Local Nature Recovery Strategies^	X	X	X
Health, wellbeing and public service reform			
A bespoke statutory health improvement and health inequalities duty^	X	X	X
Mayors engaged during the Integrated Care Boards chair appointment process		X	X
Mayors as members of local Integrated Care Partnerships, and consideration for position of chair or co-chair		X	X
A role in convening partners and driving cross-cutting public service reform, including looking at areas such as multiple disadvantage	X	X	X
Public safety			
Mayors accountable for the exercise of Police and Crime Commissioner functions where police force and mayoral boundaries align^		X	X
Mayors accountable for the exercise of Fire and Rescue Authority functions where fire and rescue service and mayoral boundaries align		X	X

Detail	Foundation	Mayoral	Established
A clear and defined role in local resilience, working with the Local Resilience Forum to embed resilience into broader policy and delivery^	X	X	

Appendix B – Click link to [Comparator Data Tables](#)

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- BCP population estimate: 404,050
- BCP+supported urban hinterland population: +500,000
- GVA £12.35bn
- Over 15,375 businesses
- Providing 189,175 jobs

Significant sectors with growth potential:

- Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing (aeronautics and marine)
- Culture, Creative and Digital Technology
- Financial Services, Fintech & Insurance
- Health, Wellbeing & Social care
- Tourism, Retail & Hospitality

Assets:

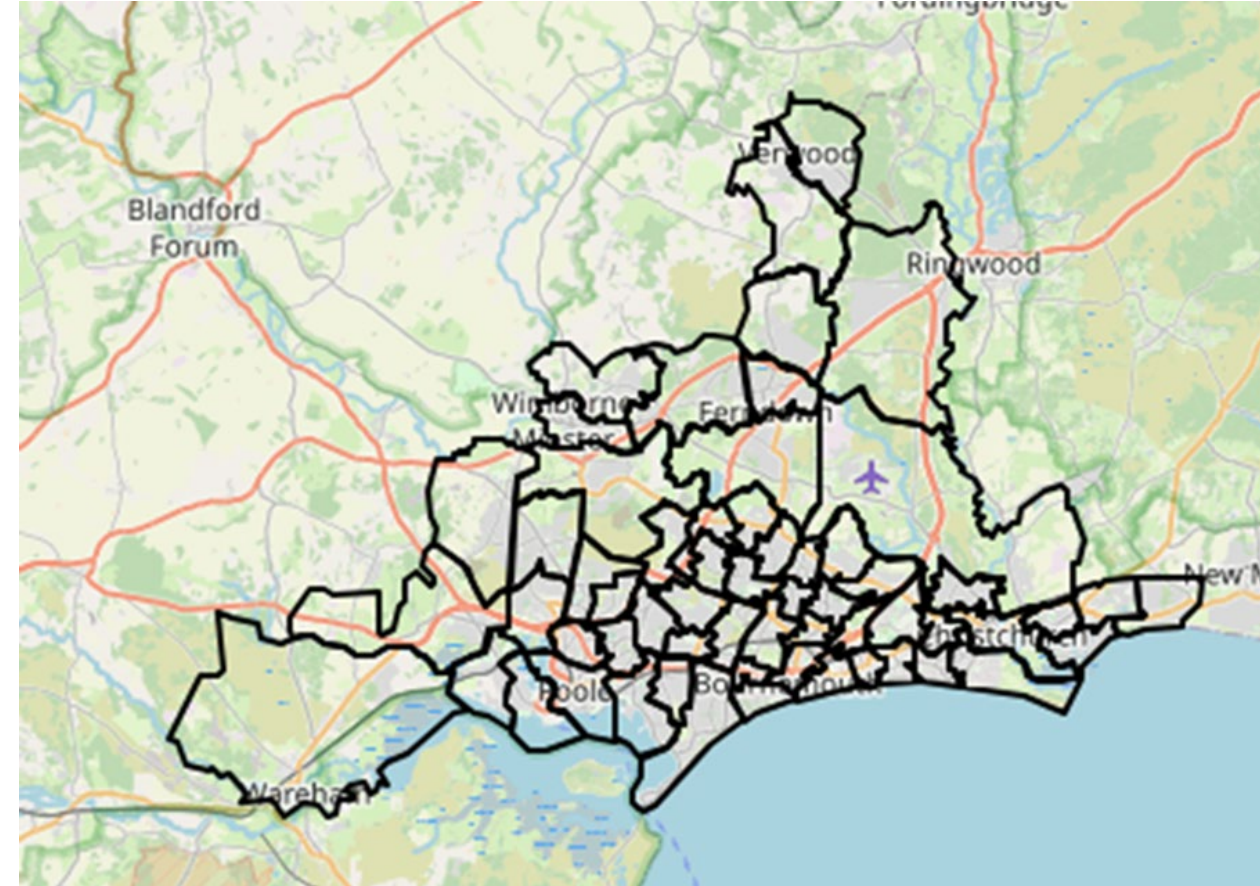
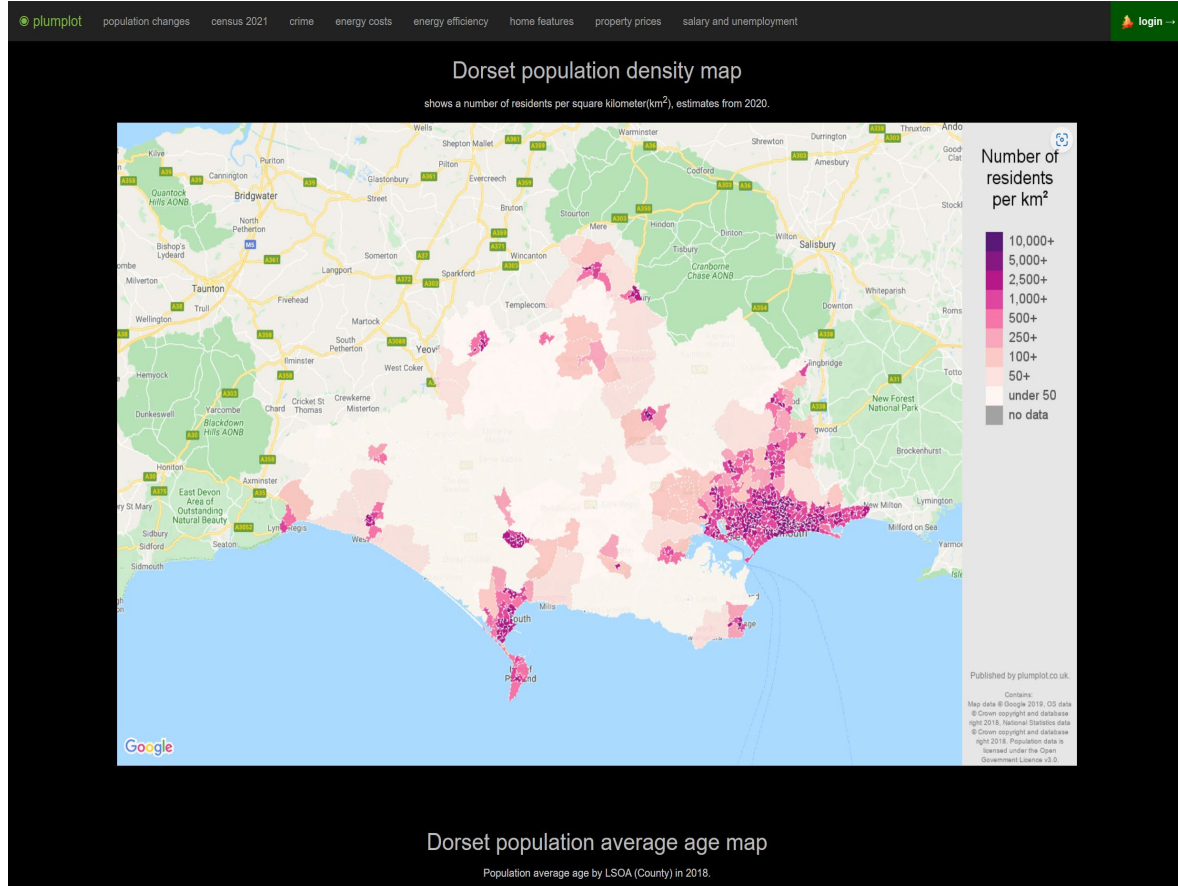
- 3 Universities & 1 FE college
- Bournemouth International Airport
- Port of Poole
- 14 miles of south-facing beach and seafront
- 19% of area is in a Site of Special Scientific Interest
- AFC Bournemouth
- International Convention Centre

A devolution deal could help us overcome our challenges:

- Congestion and poor transport infrastructure
- Connectivity (digital and physical) is weak
- Constrained access to new skills
- Ageing population (20years older than rest of UK)
- High house prices x10+ compared to national average x8+
- Restricted opportunities for new housing growth
- Coastal erosion, pockets of environmental and biodiversity degradation
- Achieving net-zero ambitions and transition to green economy
- **Productivity is low compared with national average**

Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole

BCP is a distinct area, supporting an urban hinterland, giving a population of +500,000 people



DORSET CHAMBER

REPORT ON BCP INITIAL BUSINESS CONSULTATION ON DEVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

BCP Council asked Dorset Chamber to undertake a very brief and initial business consultation to help inform a BCP discussion on the devolution area that businesses would feel is most relevant to them. With a brief explanation of what devolution means, they were asked the following question:

From a business perspective, would you feel you would benefit from being connected to either:

- a) Heart of Wessex area
- b) Hampshire/Solent area

Dorset Chamber asked its Board members, Ambassadors and Business Partners to respond. The sample was limited given the timescale for this piece of work. The majority of these businesses are based in the BCP area (although their activities will not be limited to BCP). This is appropriate given the question we are asking.

RESPONSES

A total of 26 responses were received and the responses are as follows:

Unsure/ no clear position	Dorset	Solent
2 (8%)	2 (8%)	22 (84%)

COMMENTS FROM BUSINESSES RESPONDING

Comments have not been directly attributed to respondents as they were not informed this would be the case at this time due to the urgency of the survey.

Comments received are as follows:

My view would most definitely be the Hampshire option. Ocean has businesses in Dorset and Somerset and I'd say the Somerset side is more aligned with more northern and west such as Bristol / Bath/ Taunton/Exeter. The Dorset businesses tend to look east.

Based on my experience and business success in the region, I am very much in favour of connecting with the Hampshire/Solent area. I am confident that there are significant

opportunities for businesses in Dorset, and I believe being part of the Hampshire/Solent Strategic Authority would provide a strong foundation for continued growth and success in the Central South.

No question that the greater opportunity for trade, logistics and prosperity in business is Hampshire / Solent.

It is tricky to say without knowing what each of the authorities would like to push through/prioritise. I imagine that would be quite key to see what group is more aligned with the issues businesses in the BCP area face. For most businesses, I would anticipate Hampshire/Solent would share more common ground. However, I would anticipate Heart of Wessex to be more akin to Dorset and potentially BCP – I am particularly thinking of outer Christchurch and Poole – those parts of the conurbation bordering the more rural areas. Sorry my answer is not a simple one. Without knowing more it is tricky to say but if pushed I think BCP will be better suited by Hampshire/Solent and Dorset (appreciate you are not asking about them specifically) to Wessex.

Heart of Wessex, I think we would get lost amongst Hampshire and Solent.

From a Chamber perspective I would have thought Hampshire/Solent but from a Motley business perspective Wessex makes sense.

Hampshire/Solent – I think we are more closely aligned to Hampshire as opposed to Wilts/Somerset.

Hampshire/Solent area for us (very selfish but that is where we are based!).

I don't think either option is ideal for Dorset business community – the Heart of Wessex area is going to be heavily rural focused, whilst that will have synergies with West and North Dorset, it will leave BCP isolated. Hampshire, we all know the New Forest is a big business divide. Businesses do not tend to cross it looking for B2B services. However, I think our profile in BCP is more aligned to Solent.

We're neutral, we can work in either direction. Wiltshire and Somerset seem a long way away, Dorset is not, and many areas are deeply linked to BCP – Wimborne, Ferndown etc. There are also many similarities to Solent area. A dilemma.

Based on the economic prosperity of the area, I would vote for Hampshire/Solent.

If the focus for BCP is to connect with larger urban centres and industrial hubs like Portsmouth and get stronger links to maritime industries and international trade then the Hampshire/Solent option would probably be better. Aligning with Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset may strengthen links with the tourism sector benefitting hospitality and small scale manufacturing I would have thought. What's best for the majority is to probably focus on our niche but what's best long-term, probably align with the bigger hubs.

We are not sure we would be affected either way. Although like most others in Construction, we will be looking for a speeding up of the planning process and more acceptance of Build projects - whichever way Devolution goes. My personal view is that it would seem to make sense for BCP to go with Hampshire/Solent - as these are towns/cities more aligned to the Business make up of BCP area. By the same criteria, Dorset would seem to sit better in Heart of Wessex, more rural areas.

The obvious choice would seem to be Hampshire/Solent area. I have, however, been hesitant in my making my decision. It depends on how funding is going to be delivered. The sense behind going with Solent is our connectivity is better with them, they are closer in nature to Dorset local 'hubs and cities', and we also share an obvious relationship regarding ports, marine and education (universities and colleges). It's great to build a big picture regarding these shared assets, but will the funding be more 'watered down' as a result.

Our strong preference is for 'Heart of Wessex'. Assuming Dorset joins as well, this gives a far more cohesive area. Much of Dorset is in the BCP travel to work area, and by being the largest settlement in the Strategic Authority, it should give good weight and focus to BCP (and Dorset).

We do not favour Hampshire/Solent, as there is a real risk that BCP will not be the focus, with this instead being the Portsmouth/Southampton conurbation.

From my perspective, I'd favour a link with Hampshire/Solent over Heart of Wessex mainly because of the strength of the existing/new business/client/professional relationships have naturally flowed between the Hampshire/Solent region more so than Wiltshire and Somerset. Regardless of whichever Dorset join (if either), as a region, we must have an equal footing in the stakes rather than being seen as the "little brother".

My initial feeling on this is that if this was to proceed, we would benefit more from an association with a Hampshire/Solent Strategic Authority.

BUSINESSES RESPONDING

The following businesses responded to this snap survey:

Ocean Automotive
Caron Khan Creative Consultant
YMCA Bournemouth
ReidSteel
Frettons
Trethowans
Blue Sky Financial Planning
Savills
Motley
Purple HR
Lester Aldridge
Y-Not Finance
Azets
Bournemouth and Poole College
HSBC
Digital Storm
Newsquest (Echo)
Martin Beardsley Ltd
Superior Seals
Harry J Palmer
Morebus
Baguette and Son
Lewis Manning Hospice Care
Enhanced
Aspire Jobs
Tru Talent

CONCLUSION

Based on this limited nap survey, it's clear the majority of business feel that the Solent option is more relevant and of benefit to them.

Ian Girling
Dorset Chamber
9th January 2025

Devolution options



English Devolution White Paper, Strategic Authorities



Universal coverage of Strategic Authorities

Our goal is simple. Universal coverage in England of Strategic Authorities – which should be a number of councils working together, covering areas that people recognise and work in

Exec summary: However, in order to ensure that citizens across England benefit from devolution, and to ensure the effective running of public services, we will legislate for a ministerial directive. This will allow the creation of those Strategic Authorities where local leaders have, after due time has been allowed, not been able to make progress.

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Detail: However, in order to ensure a complete national layer of Strategic Authorities is in place to devolve further powers to in future, we will legislate for a ministerial directive, which will enable the government to create Strategic Authorities in any remaining places where local leaders in that region have not been able to agree how to access devolved powers. Our commitment to working in partnership holds firm, and so the government will limit its use of this power to instances when other routes have been exhausted. We will ensure that the ministerial directive is used to conclude the process where there is majority support, or the formation is essential in completing the roll out of Strategic Authorities in England.

Approach to filling the map

The government will work collaboratively with local government to deliver on the ambition of universal coverage of Strategic Authorities in England.

English Devolution White Paper, powers and co-ordination

The government will put a framework into legislation setting out the powers that go with each type of authority....
The most far-reaching and flexible powers will be for Mayoral Strategic Authorities

Reforming and joining up public services:

Police and crime Commissioner duties

Fire and Rescue Authorities

Integrated Care Partnerships and IC Boards

Plus, alignment of boundaries for these plus probation, job centres and local authorities

Local Government Reorganisation - "where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality public services." **Note - not for BCP Council**

English Devolution White Paper - Key areas for influence and control



1. Transport and local infrastructure
2. Skills and employment support
3. Housing and strategic planning
4. Economic development and regeneration
5. Environment and climate change
6. Health, wellbeing and public service reform
7. Public safety

English Devolution White Paper – comments on scale and geography



When agreeing geographies the government will consider the following principles:

Scale: SA's - the default assumption is for a combined population of 1.5 million or above

Economies: SA's focus on functional economic areas, travel-to-work patterns and local labour markets.

Contiguity: Any proposed geography must be contiguous across its constituent councils

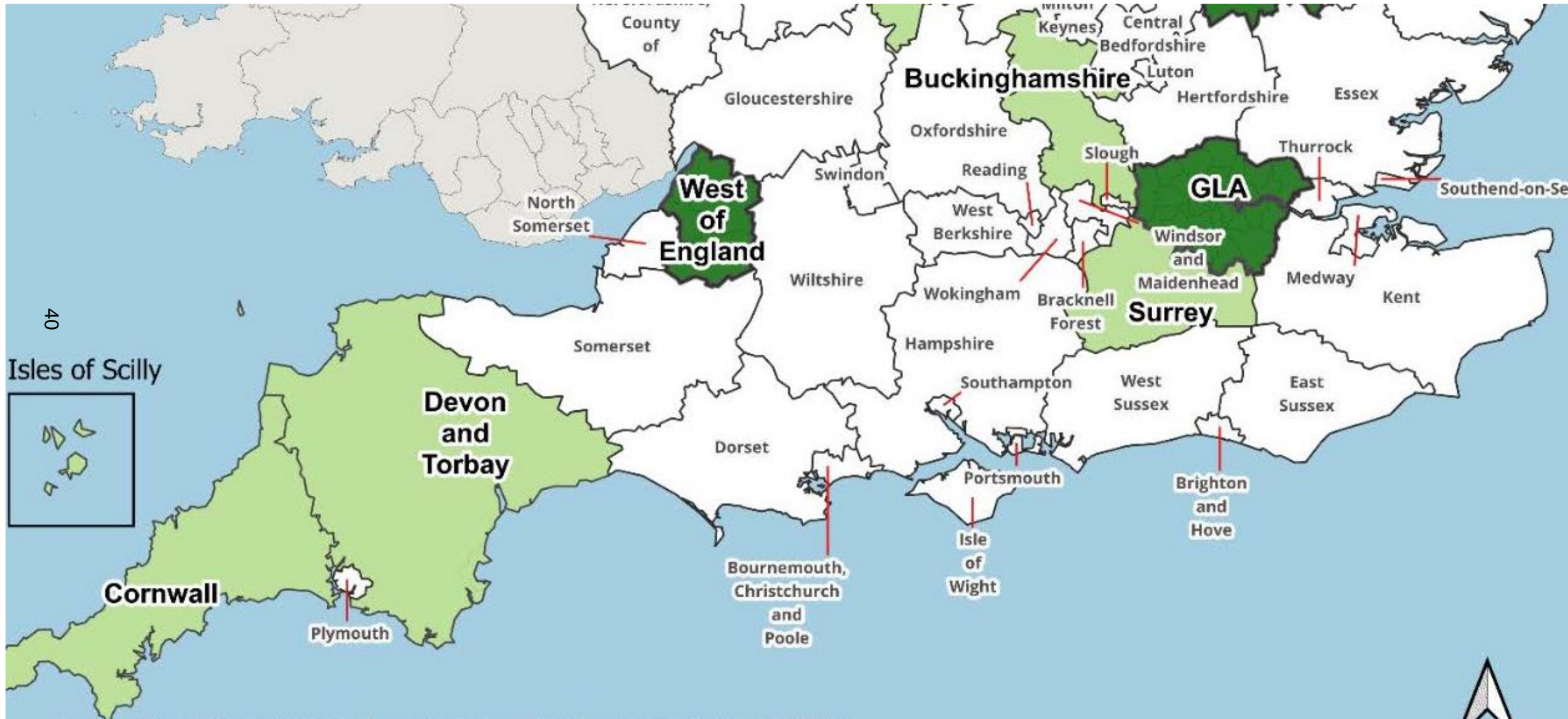
No 'devolution islands': Geographies must not create devolution 'islands'

Delivery: Geographies should ensure the effective delivery of key functions including Spatial Development Strategies, Local Transport Plans and Get Britain Working Plans.

Alignment: Promote alignment between devolution and other public sector boundaries.

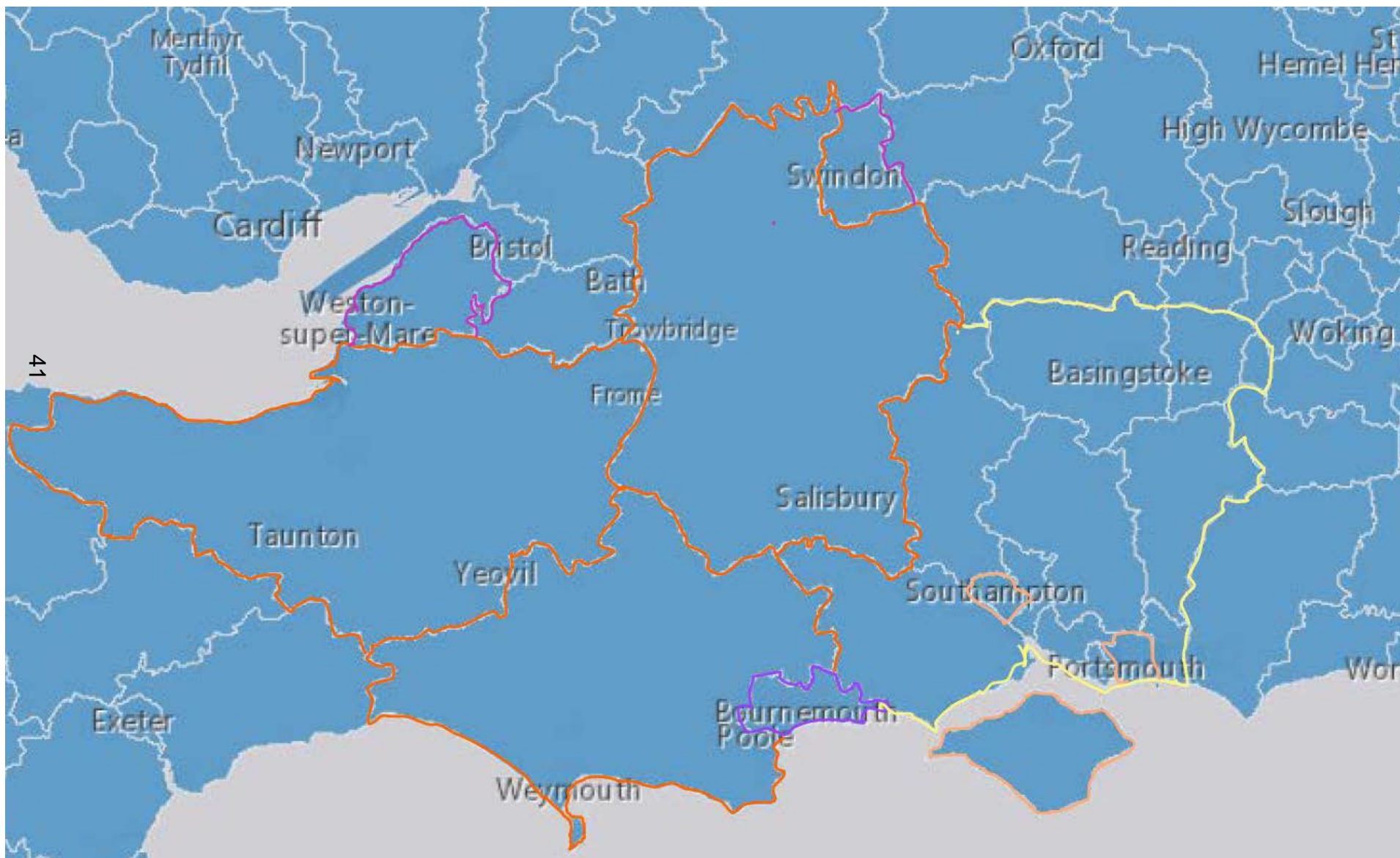
Identity: local identity plays a key role in enabling SA's to be held to account.

Devolution Options – existing framework



Source: Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 (2024)

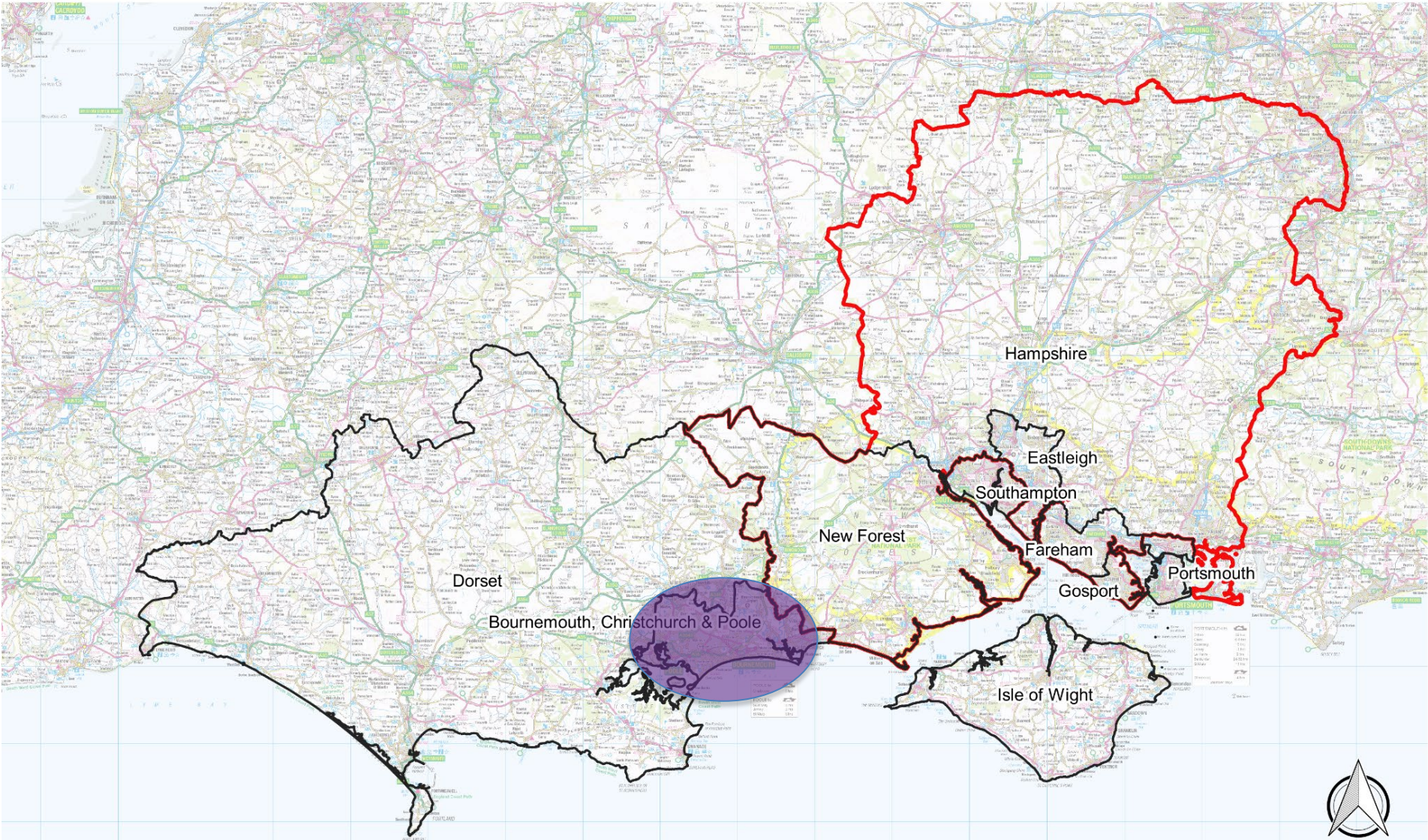
Devolution Options



Heart of Wessex:
4-6 UA's

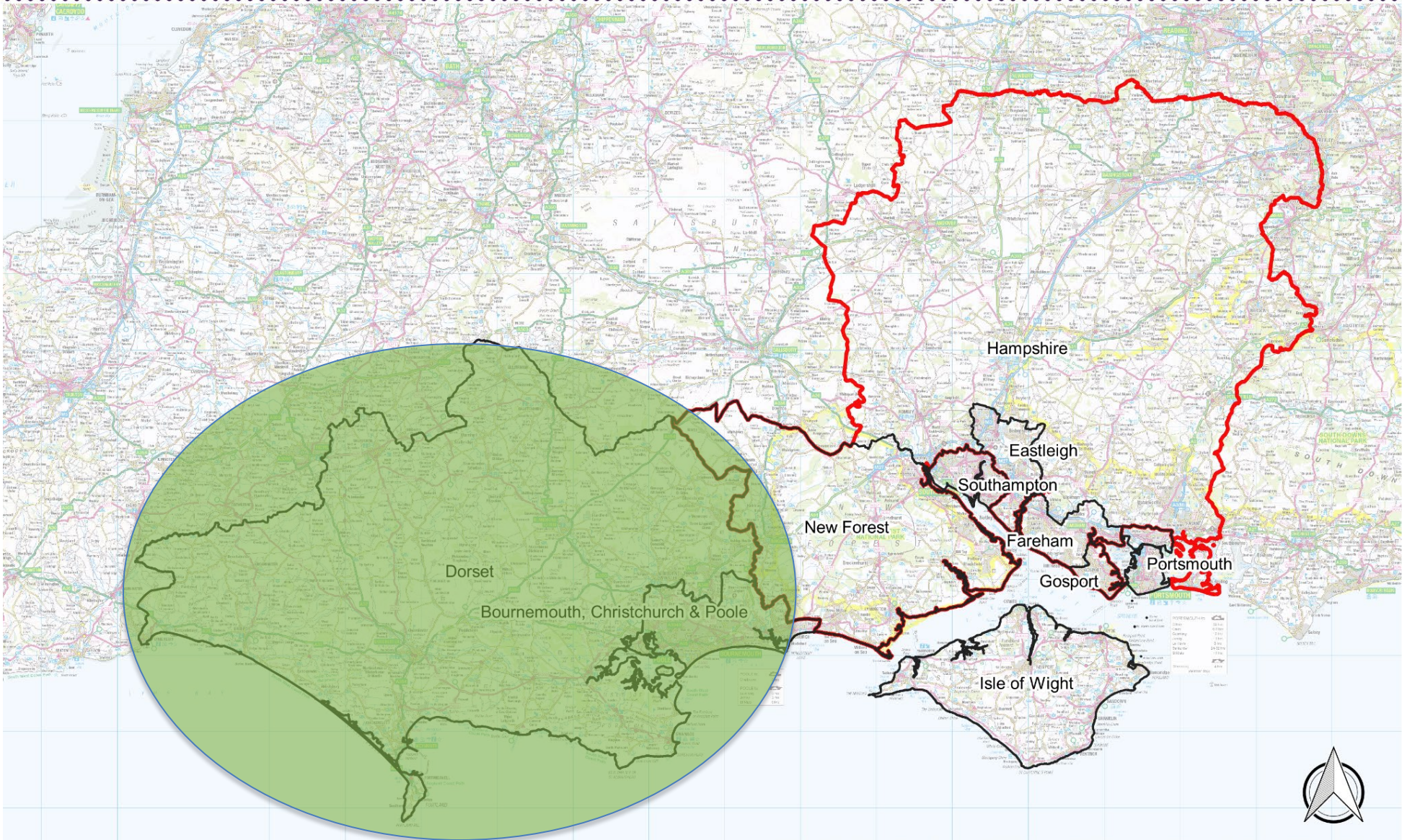
**Hampshire and
Solent:**
3 UA's
10 DC's
1 CC

Devolution Options Explored: BCP only

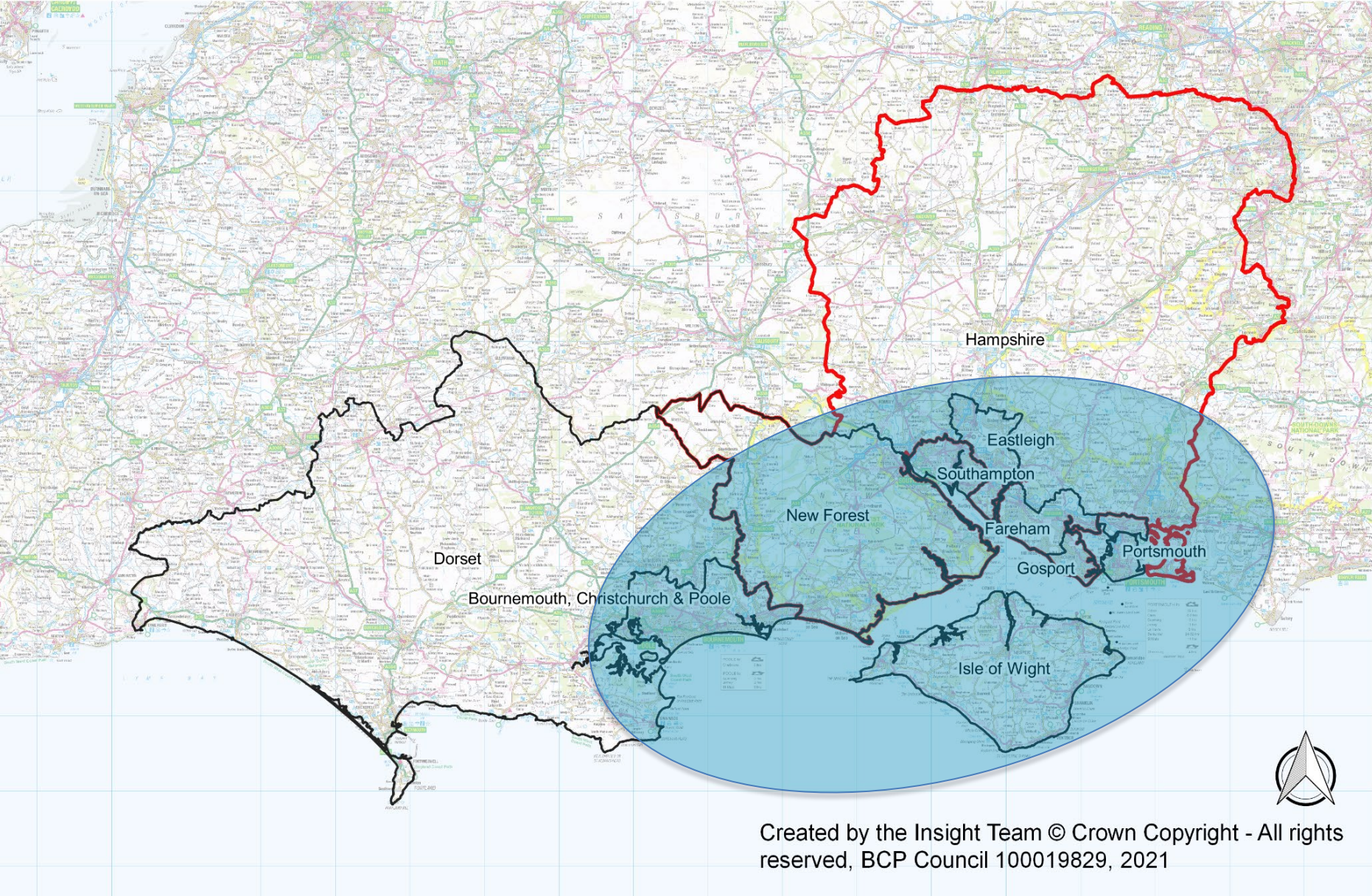


Devolution Options Explored: pan-Dorset county area

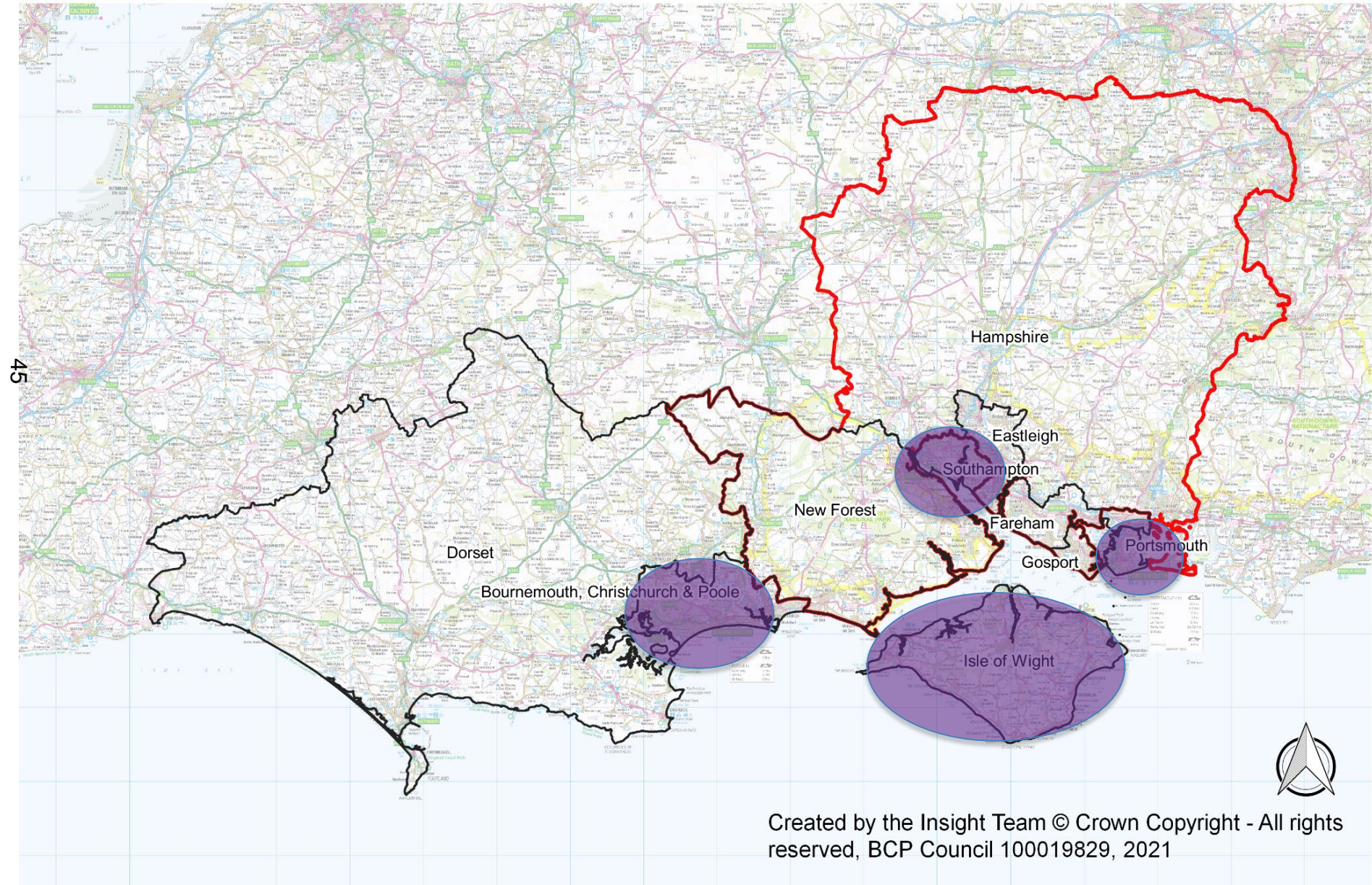
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Devolution Options Explored: Central South

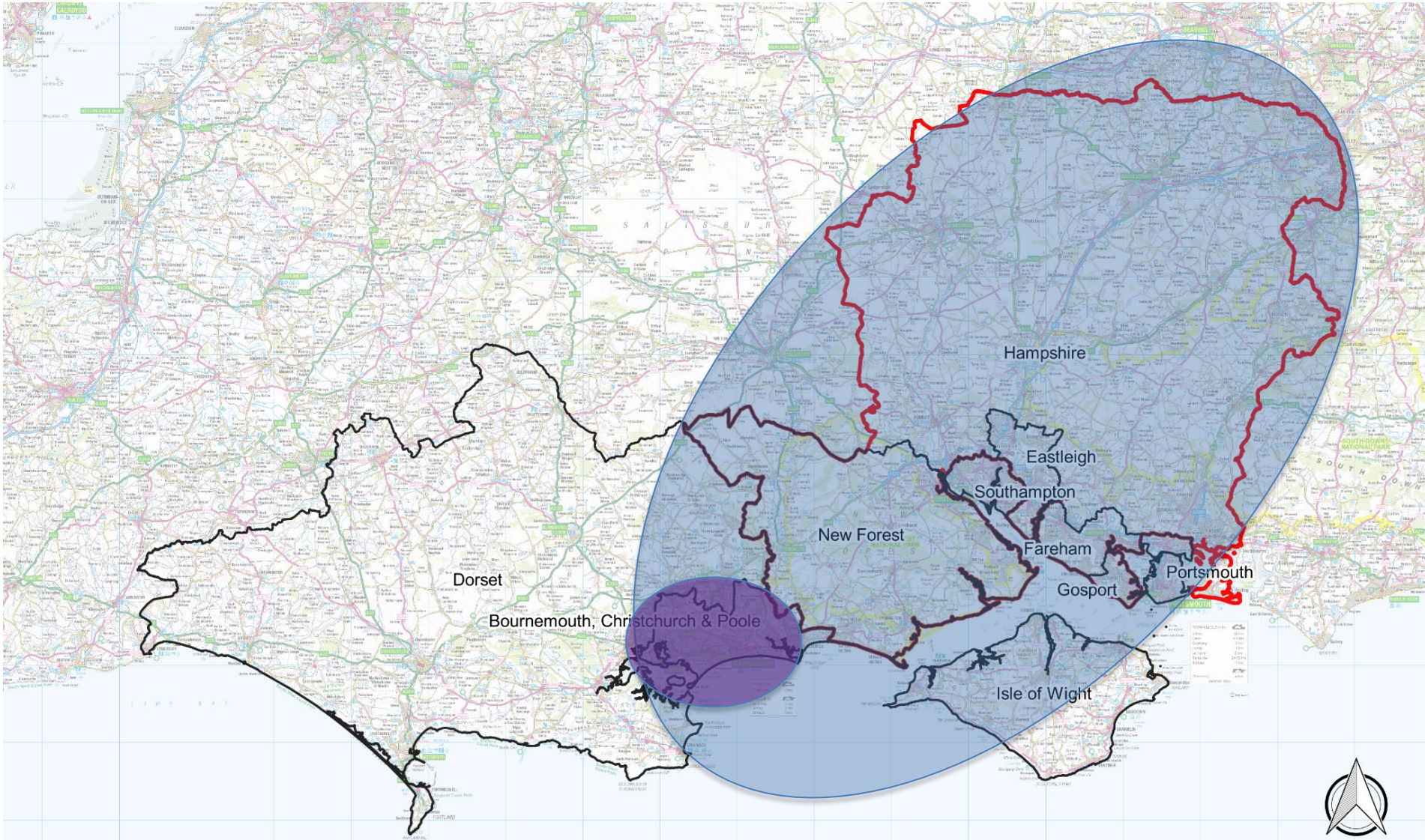


Devolution Options Explored: Solent unitary authorities



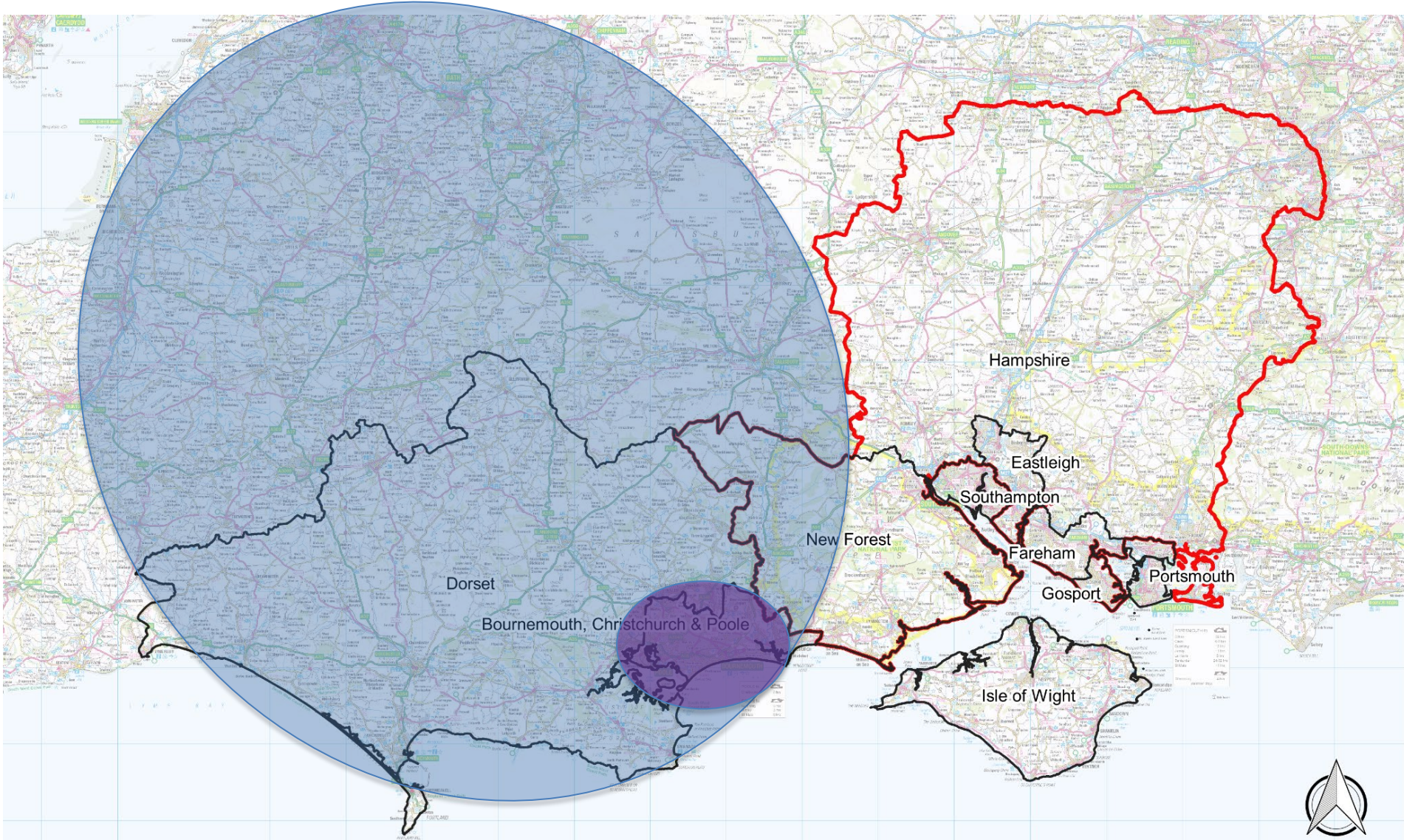
Devolution Options Explored: Pan-Hampshire incl. BCP

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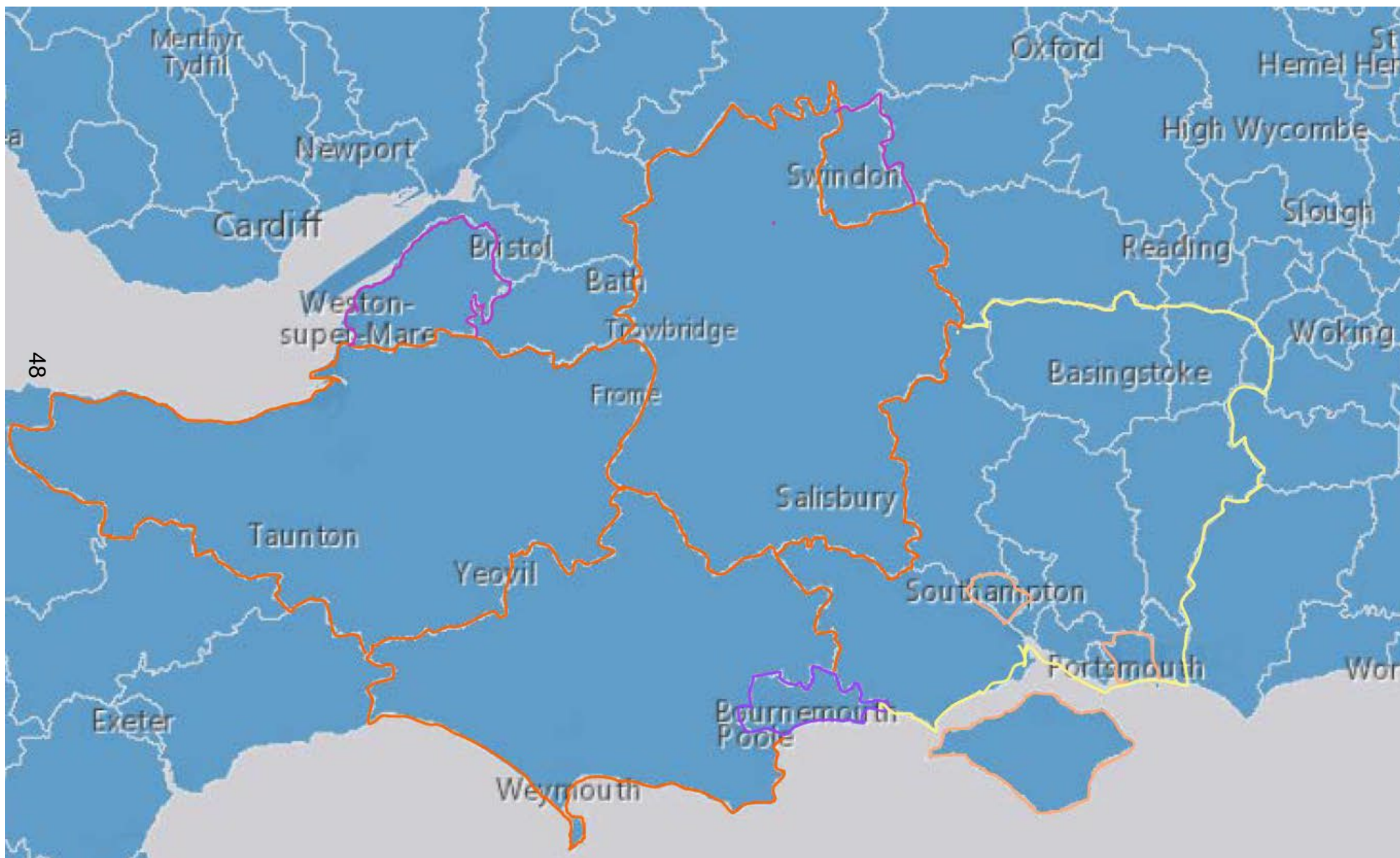


Devolution Options Explored: Heart of Wessex

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Devolution Options



Heart of Wessex:
3-6 UA's

**Hampshire and
Solent:**
3 UA's
10 DC's
1 CC

Existing regional links

Hampshire and Solent:

- Central South economic area
(led by Southampton University)
- Transport infrastructure
M 27/M3/SW Rail
- FCERM links – Christchurch Bay
- Some planning and mineral links
- Historical (pre-1974 LGR) connections

Heart of Wessex/South West

- Government region – SW (all Depts, agencies)
- LGA – SW region
- Professional groups (CEX's, DCS, DASS, Libraries)
- SW Councils (and Leader's network)
- SW Resilience networks inc. military and LRF
- South Western Ambulance Service
- Health and Public Health – SW region
- Dorset Police and Probation – SW region
- Western Gateway sub-national transport body
- Great SW pan-regional partnership
- Local Enterprise Partnership (pan-Dorset)
- Chamber of Commerce & Industry (pan-Dorset)
- Dorset Heaths Partnership
- Poole Harbour Nutrients Scheme

Devolution options



English Devolution White Paper – MHCLG webinar on the Devolution Priority Programme

9th January 2025

On 9th January, MHCLG held a short webinar to give a broad overview of plans for the Devolution White Paper, with specific focus on the priority programme.

The premise of the devolution priority programme is that the department is asking for councils interested in or who have proposals for mayoral combined authorities where they do not already exist. The deadline for submissions is 10th January.

This is the fastest timeline – those who submit their proposals, subject to approval, would be able to establish their new structure and hold mayoral elections in May 2026.

For areas to be accepted onto the priority programme, MHCLG will determine whether their proposals meet necessary criteria but a final decision is made by the Secretary of State.

The intention in establishing new structures needed for devolution is that once the English Devolution Bill has been given royal assent, that functions can be up and running from day one.

Q&A:

Is it the Government's intention that all areas will be unitarised by April 2028?

Response: All two-tier areas are *invited* to submit proposals in January this year. The first unitaries will be running in the year 2027/28. The speed of progressing devolution is dependent on the proposals that are submitted and an assessment of how soon they can be achieved.

What is the evidence underpinning the 500k population area?

Response: PWC report sets out the evidence and found that greater efficiencies are available through reorganisation into single unitaries and simpler structures of local government focusing on delivering for residents.

In order to be a part of the priority programme, do all upper tier authorities in an area have to 'make the ask', or is the majority enough to be considered?

Response: The final point of consent for establishing a strategic authority is when the consent is given by councils to the statutory instrument that establishes that body – all of the constituent members have to provide that consent. So in the case of a combined authority, it would mean all the councils within that area, and in a combined county authority, it would be all of the upper tier local authorities in that area.

How will the priority programme be run?

Response: The priority programme is about extending mayoral devolution and as such, current mayoral institutions are not in scope. Those in the process of discussing devolution without a mayor are invited to be on the programme provided they are pursuing a mayoral structure. There is no limit on the number of areas to be on the priority list.

After the deadline has been reached, Civil Servants will advise Ministers whether those who have submitted proposals meet the necessary criteria. MHCLG will then run consultations for those places on the priority programme.

What is the rationale for having accelerated timelines for areas not selected to be on the priority programme?

Response: There are some areas of the country where local government reorganisation is required to unlock devolution – this is to ensure that those areas can unlock the benefits of devolution as soon as possible.

Will Police & Crime Commissioners serve out their full term before powers are transferred to Mayors?

Response: This will be worked out on a case by case basis for each area.

What expectation that constituent councils engage with non-constituents on being part of priority programme, what happens if they do not engage?

Response: Upper tier local authorities have to consent to establishing new institutions, however Government expect that areas can evidence that they have made efforts to engage with district councils.

When devolution agreed for an area, what next?

Response:

- Applications for the priority programme by 10th January
- There will be a few weeks of internal process of selecting areas to be in the programme
- Launch of government-led consultations to establish whether criteria has been met
- All constituent authorities will have to provide consent
- MHCLG will work with Councils who will form part of the future strategic authority
- Councils will appoint a returning officer – typically a Chief Executive of one of the constituent authorities

Timeline for the English Devolution Bill?

Response: Specific timeline is to be confirmed, however it is expected that the Bill will be introduced later this year. The Bill will enact the policy set out in the White Paper.

On Mayoral powers: is there potential for upper tier local authority responsibilities to be transferred to Mayors?

Response: There is scope to expand some functions at strategic authority level. For example in highways, oversight of the Key Route Network may be extended to Mayors. But overall there are no plans to move functions wholesale up to the strategic level. Local authorities will have the freedom to discharge their responsibilities.

What happens to those areas not selected for the priority programme?

Response: The door will not be closed, ministers are clear they want areas to move forward with plans for devolution and there will be later tranches to do this.

Is there an expectation that all areas will undergo local government reorganisation at some stage?

Response: All two-tier areas will be invited to develop unitary proposals in January, regardless of whether they are on the priority programme. Full proposals will be expected.

Will planned or ongoing boundary reviews be halted in areas undergoing devolution process?

Response: MHCLG is in conversation with the electoral commission. There will be clarity on this with relevant areas once proposals progress.

There are some negotiations for non-mayoral devolution, is the expectation that they will migrate to mayoral strategic authorities by 2028?

Response: The new Government's preference is for Mayoral strategic authorities across the country so that is the ultimate hope. There is no date currently set for that ambition. The WP is also clear that not every area will be ready for a mayor yet. The priority programme is for those areas that are.

For mayoral areas with two-tier authorities – the successor unitaries will become the constituents of the combined authority. The English Devolution Bill will grant the power to convert combined county authorities to combined authorities more simply.

What is the process for assimilating Councils into existing mayoral combined authorities?

Response: Some councils may wish to join neighbouring mayoral combined authorities where it would make good economic geographic sense to do so, and for the MCA boundary to be extended to include them. The work needed to do with this is out of scope of the priority programme, but the enthusiasm to pursue devolution through this route is recognised. There will need to be discussions between CS and Ministers on how this can take place. But for now the priority programme is the immediate focus.

Is Local Govt Reorganisation mandatory or not?

Response: The White Paper sets out the ambition and currently councils are invited only to submit proposals. They are expected, but remain an invitation only.

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Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole (BCP) – right time, right place.

Our preferred geography for devolution is the area of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, which best recognises the urban nature of our economic geography, and provides the opportunity for the businesses, people and places within it to achieve their enormous potential.

The BCP area is home to 404,100 people, but over 500,000 live in the immediate urban hinterland and are dependent on the BCP economy. The area has significant economic assets rivalling many much larger city regions, including:

- 3 universities & 1 FE college
- Bournemouth International Airport
- Port of Poole (commercial and leisure operations)
- 14 miles of south-facing beach and seafront
- 19% of the area is in a Site of Special Scientific Interest
- AFC Bournemouth, a Premier League football club
- Bournemouth International Convention Centre
- 6 Arts Council National Portfolio Organisations.

There are over 15,375 businesses, providing 189,175 jobs, contributing £12.35bn in GVA, focussing on a range of strong key sectors including:

- Advanced engineering & manufacturing (aeronautics and marine),
- Culture, creative and digital technology
- Financial services, fintech & insurance
- Health, wellbeing & social care and
- Tourism, retail & hospitality.

This depth and variation ensure economic resilience as well as future growth potential.

BCP Council, formed in 2019 following the most complex local government reorganisation in four decades, provides a single focus that directly reflects the economic geography of the area and the opportunities ahead.

We are fortunate that BCP is already a place where people want to live, work, study, and visit, however it faces challenges that impact productivity levels and the ability to grow. We chose this geography because it will enable us to focus powers and investment to:

- Ensure businesses have access to the skilled talent they need to grow
- Ensure our communities have access to good employment opportunities
- Address our housing pressures
- Improve local and regional transport
- Meet our net-zero ambitions and transition to a green economy
- Deliver investment, drive productivity
- Create an even more inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable economy.

To achieve these objectives, we will need to work with others; with Dorset and Wiltshire Councils on road improvements to and from the M4 and M5, with Hampshire and Surrey Councils to improve rail times and road links to and from London and with the Great South West to improve regional links to the west. Devolution on a BCP basis will enable us to work smarter and faster across these regions and partners.

We are extremely ambitious for the future of our area and recognise that it is the right time to grasp this opportunity. The BCP area is blessed with economic assets within a clearly defined economic area. With devolved powers we can work even more closely with our communities to improve productivity and seize the enormous potential to grow.

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