

# **Rural civil society, devolution and local government re-organisation**

RSN 'Rural Communities' Seminar – 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025



# Content

- What makes civil society different in rural areas?
- What's going on over devolution and re-organisation?
  - Creation of new Strategic Authorities, their areas and powers
  - Re-organisation of local government into Unitary Authorities
- What are the opportunities and risks for rural areas and rural civil society?

# Scope

- Devolution to Strategic Authorities (all types)
- Re-configuration of Councils in two-tier areas to all Unitary Authorities
- Devolution Bill
- Roles and powers of new Unitary Authorities and Local Councils
- Local Transport Authorities and bus franchising
- Local Government funding formula
- Planning system and Land Use Framework

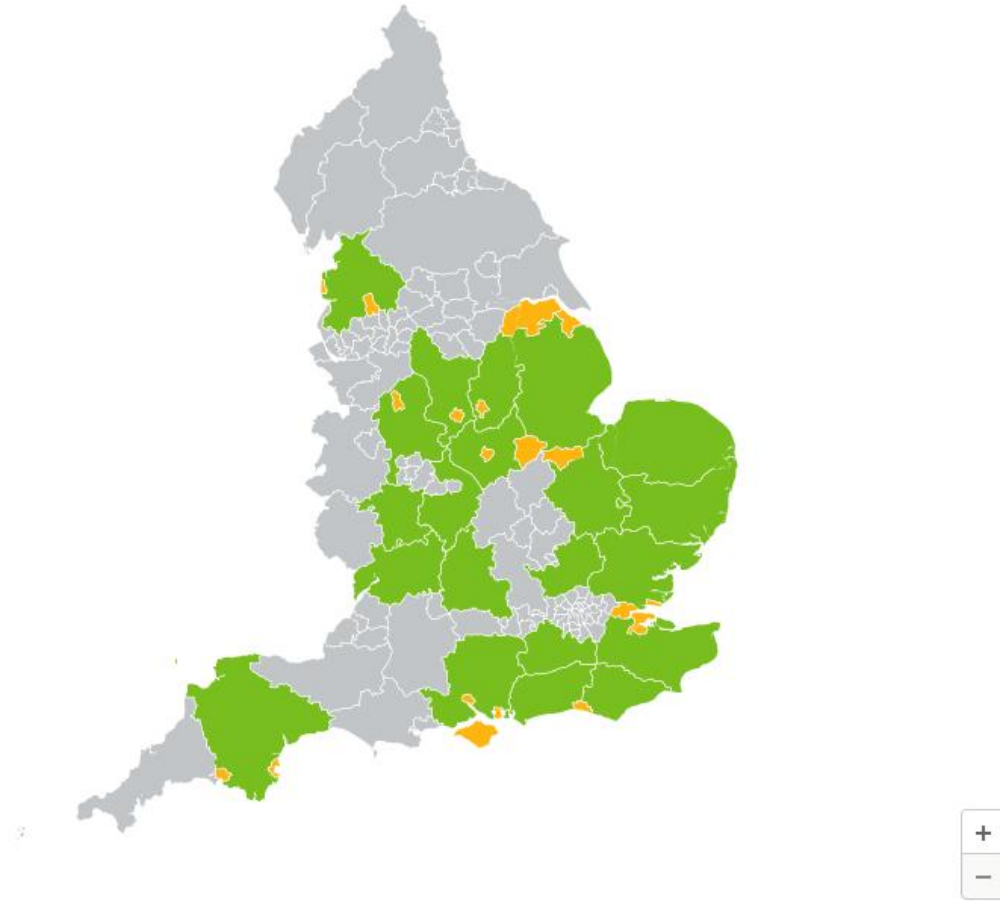
# What we all know about rural places, or do we?

1. Governance and collective action – Local Councils
2. Community owned assets – Village Halls, community shops.....
3. Reciprocity – In rural charities its not just about giving and receiving
4. Contribution – ‘Volunteering’ is part of the fabric of living there
5. Community subsidy – It is the people who offset the market’s failures
6. Economies of scope – Scope not scale, multi-use rocks!
7. We give permission – To act, to intervene (and to fail!)
8. The informal economy – Its not all about money.

# The path we are on:

1. In rural parts of England, LGR's start point is:
  - Now, 21 Two tier Counties
  - 164 Districts/Boroughs
  - Now, approximately 20 Unitary Authorities
2. Moving to a pattern for rural areas of:
  - Estimate: c.19-22 Strategic Authorities of >1.5m population
  - Estimate: In total 60 'rural' Unitary Authorities of "average". 500k population
  - An average of 3 UAs in each SA
3. LGR: total number new Unitary Authorities in 21 counties – approx. 47?

■ Invited two-tier area ■ Invited unitary authority ■ Not invited



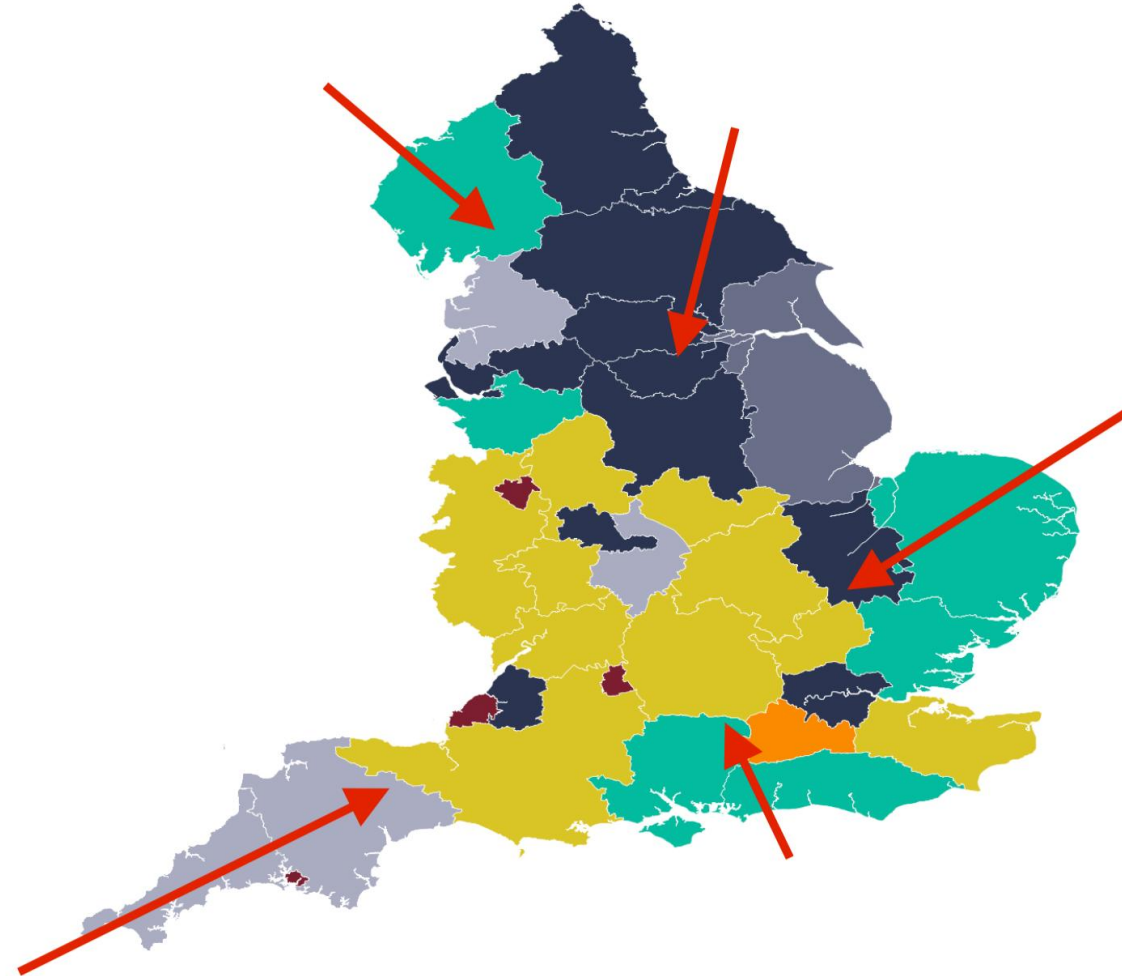
Source: MHCLG, correspondence: 'Local government reorganisation: invitation to local authorities in two-tier areas', 6 February 2025 • Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2020 • [Get the data](#) • [Embed](#) • [Download image](#)



# LGC Devolution Map

Boundaries and status of the emerging new tier of English strategic authorities

- Strategic authority
- Priority programme
- Foundational devolution
- First mayoral elections May 2025
- Discussions ongoing
- Devo island
- Reorganisation fast track



Base map by Clare Harvey  
Created for LGC

# The path we are not on (maybe):





# New Strategic Authorities - competencies

1. These may be subject to the provisions of the Devolution Bill:
  - 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
2. It is a mix of responsibilities that have been delegated in the past to various regional and sub-regional bodies, new ones and ones currently held by County Councils
3. Note: “..public service reform..”

# Big Unitaries. But are Strategic Authorities big enough?

1. Local Government will be more distant, with larger constituencies.
2. Parish and Town Councils – cometh the hour, cometh the sector!
3. ....but will this be enough, and have P&T Councils already stepped up?
4. What will be the implications of geography and boundaries:
  1. For the new Unitaries?
  2. For the new Strategic authorities
5. How generous are the residents of urban areas feeling towards their country cousins ... and will there be doughnuts for tea?
6. Is party politics playing too much of a role at the moment?
7. Might rural transport have the biggest opportunity since 1985?