

Reimagining the Local State

Monday 25 November 2024
Sheffield

@reformthinktank
#localstate



Agenda

10.00 - 10.30	Registration and refreshments
10.30 - 10.45	Welcome and introduction Charlotte Pickles, Director, <i>Reform</i>
10.45 - 11.30	Keynote address – Reimagining the Local State Tracy Brabin, Mayor, West Yorkshire Combined Authority
11.30 - 12.30	Panel one – Modern municipalism: transforming city government This panel will explore the many elements of a modern, innovative municipalism. Sarah Calkin, Editor, <i>Local Government Chronicle</i> Kersten England CBE, Chair, The Young Foundation & Bradford 2025 UK City of Culture Cllr Tom Hunt, Leader, Sheffield City Council Jo Johnston, Head of Reform and Innovation, Manchester City Council
12.30 - 13.30	Break for lunch
13.30 - 14.30	Panel two – Beyond bureaucracy: achieving future-proof local government This panel will explore how to empower and inspire a skilled local government workforce, how to harness modern technologies, and how to meet citizens' expectations for sustainable and high-quality services. James Johns, Head of Corporate Affairs, Workday Alison McKenzie-Folan, Chief Executive, Wigan Council Angie Ridgwell, Chief Executive, Hertfordshire County Council Carol Williams, Director, Transformation & Digital, Walsall Council, & President, Socitm
14.30 - 15.30	In conversation with Oliver Coppard and Kate Josephs Oliver Coppard, Mayor, South Yorkshire Combined Authority Kate Josephs CB, Chief Executive, Sheffield City Council
15.30 - 15.45	Closing remarks Dr Simon Kaye, Policy Director, <i>Reform</i>
15.45 - 16.00	Refreshments

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Our mission

While 2024 has delivered a new Government, Britain continues to face the same – era-defining – challenges. Geopolitical tensions and risks continue as the backdrop to domestic decisions. Demographic and technological change, already reshaping the nation, continues at pace. And economic growth, the number one mission of the new Labour Government, remains elusive.

At *Reform*, we believe that Britain's prosperity is inextricably linked to the health of our public services and the effectiveness of the State. Yet the public service institutions and approaches we rely on remain modified versions of those built as part of the post-war settlement. The aims and ambitions of those who designed them were inspiring, but the challenges that faced 1940s Britain are not those of today. Continuing to tweak a broken system, hoping for radically different outcomes, won't work.

Instead, we want to see a public service model that reduces demand rather than simply manages it. We want to see a settlement that recognises that the welfare of the people cannot – and should not – be delivered by the State alone.

In practice we think that means overhauling the centre: dismantling top-down bureaucracies and building local capabilities; rethinking outdated institutions; and challenging existing models.

That is precisely what our 'Reimagining the State' programme is focused on: putting forward bold but implementable ideas to transform how our state infrastructure works.

I am delighted to welcome you to our annual 'Reimagining the Local State' conference, again bringing together reform-minded leaders, experts and practitioners. Some of the most innovative and exciting reforms are happening at the local level, demonstrating that we can indeed do better. We are at a pivotal point for devolution, and I look forward to discussing the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Thank you for joining us.



Charlotte Pickles
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Our team



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Reimagining the Local State: towards a new localism



Dr Simon Kaye
Policy Director,
Reform
@stkaye

This is a moment of radical change for English local government.

We are inventing, almost from scratch, an entirely new regional and strategic tier of Combined Authorities and Metro Mayors, and unprecedented control over resources is promised to the longest established. A new round of reorganisation and unitarisation could spell the end of the two-tier system. Radical policy changes are being telegraphed for our industrial strategy, local growth plans, and systems of planning and housebuilding.

It's too easy, particularly when you're outside the sector looking in, to forget that many local authorities are still sitting far too close to the ragged edge of financial disaster. So many of the underlying causes – a lack of fiscal autonomy, rocketing demand for statutory services, and a collapsing local audit market – have yet to be addressed.

These layers of opportunity and challenge only add complexity to the context for a system of local government which itself is often a hotbed of innovative practices.

The governance of England's urban centres plays host to many of these innovations. Our cities are where the new generation of regional-scale institutions first emerged, and where they are maturing fastest. While our city councils and boroughs are often particularly exposed to financial pressures, they are also the places where experiments in public service provision often play out.

Cities in England usually lack organised hyper-local governance, but are instead

home to community groups which turn the diversity and bustle of urban life into a source of dynamism and strength. The potential for partnerships across public and private sectors is vast, as is the scope for aligning and integrating services in a way that makes sense for a whole place.

Very often the success of these initiatives hinges upon adopting modernised practices and innovative approaches to the work of the council itself. This is true for our towns and cities – and beyond them. This is vital at a time when the core internal functions of local government are pressurised by shifting workforces, financial challenges, and the increasing expectations of devolution.

Birmingham and Manchester have taken dramatic steps in integrating their transport networks. Sheffield has developed an Age Friendly City approach and a 'defining our neighbourhoods' project. Preston and Wigan have pioneered new ways of thinking about the social contract between the local state and residents, sometimes with dramatic implications for the local economy and local public services. In London, councils are establishing standing citizens' assemblies, Data Trusts, and participatory approaches to data governance, while Bristol has made use of participatory budgeting approaches.

With deeper devolution and innovative approaches, if met by an ambitious new model for local government finance, the foundation for a revolutionary new localism will be set.

Delivered by devolution



Tracy Brabin
Mayor, West Yorkshire
Combined Authority
@TracyBrabin

For local and regional government, the last 5 years have been characterised by cuts, cancellations and chaos. From the derailment of the HS2 project, to the huge financial burden placed on local government, all four previous Prime Ministers failed to grasp the existential challenge facing the local state. One thing Kemi Badenoch and I can agree on is that, over the last 5 years, standards have slipped.

Although 2019 saw the “end of austerity”, funding for local government has not been enough to rescue public services or meet the scale of the challenges we face.

From the pandemic to the RAAC concrete crisis to spiralling social care costs, the burden on the local state has been the biggest since World War II. And with political chaos from the centre and financial constraints on local government, the effect on public confidence has been huge. Towards the end of the last government, it was revealed that trust in politicians to deliver was less than 50 per cent – the lowest on record.

And with investment in infrastructure throughout the last parliament the lowest since ‘97, it’s no wonder the last government presided over just 0.1 per cent growth in 2023.

On July 4th, the country voted for change. But change cannot be delivered from the centre alone. Change needs to be seen to be believed, and it will fall to the local state to deliver it.

So earlier this Autumn, I was pleased to see my colleague Rachel Reeves balance the books, while also protecting funding for that which is crucial to growth: investment in services and infrastructure. There is no golden goose for growth, but you can’t expect to boost the economy without boosting investment.

Leeds is the biggest city in Western Europe without a mass-transit system, and while my plans for an integrated transport network won’t be cheap, it will bring significant economic growth to our region. Phase 2 alone of Nottingham’s tram network created 8,000 jobs and boosted their economy by £300m per year.

In West Yorkshire, mass-transit would boost our businesses and supply chains for decades and support the redevelopment of many areas that have felt economically left-behind, connecting them with new jobs, skills and opportunities.

I’m determined to deliver on my promise of mass-transit for West Yorkshire. Not just to drive growth, but to connect communities and families.

Importantly, I’m also determined to grow our regional economy and demonstrate the ability of politicians to deliver infrastructure. Because not doing so would risk our ability to maintain and invest in services for the future.

Only by giving mayors the powers to deliver can we start to rebuild trust in politics and restore national confidence.

Modern municipalism: transforming city government

Combined authorities will be central to a modern municipalism



Sarah Calkin
Editor, *Local Government Chronicle*
@sjcalkin

The modern council is a very different beast to the hierarchical and paternalistic organisations of old. The best contemporary local authorities see themselves as stewards of their place, are alive to the power they have to drive change simply by getting the right local players in the room and value the voices of their communities and workforces. Rather than issuing diktats from the town hall, they are increasingly looking to operate at neighbourhood level and develop deep links into their communities.

Many councils are now seeking to build partnerships with residents and businesses to enable them to do more for themselves or in conjunction with the voluntary sector. Procurement is increasingly not about the lowest price but which providers can deliver the most overall social value.

Of course much of this has been borne out of necessity: having faced among the largest budget cuts in the public sector during austerity, councils simply could not carry on as they were. And it does not mean that all is well when it comes to the quality and availability of services.

This open and collaborative way of working is also far from universal, even within councils which are responsible for a dizzying array of services each with their own dynamics and sub cultures.

But more broadly there is a sense that something of a divide has opened up between those councils that realised fairly early on that austerity and squeezed budgets were the new normal and those that hunkered down and waited for it to pass. The former seriously looked to transform how they operated when there was still fat in the system to do so flexibly. Many of the latter are only now starting to move beyond salami slicing budgets whilst under extreme financial pressure, often via some failed experiments in commercialism.

So that's where we are. What happens next? Councils are encouraged by the new Government's more respectful approach to local government and the repeatedly stated commitment to devolution. However, there is concern, particularly in places that do not yet have devolution deals, that ministers are too interested in Metro Mayors and Combined Authorities and do not fully appreciate the role of councils in their own right.

These are valid concerns but there is some exciting work going on in many of the existing Combined Authorities, particularly around skills and tackling long term unemployment. These relatively new players seem set to be central to a modern municipalism, an approach that is focused on economic growth as a force for good and recognises that good employment and stable housing are the best means of preventing demand for public services.

The relational state and new municipalism



Kersten England CBE
Chair, The Young
Foundation
@kersten_england

Helen Goulden, the Chief Executive of the Young Foundation, wrote recently that “the UK’s public services are in acute crisis. Political trust is on the floor. The struggles people and communities face are many and deeply knitted together. We must be prepared to unravel and reweave for the common good”. In this turbulent moment, local government is uniquely placed to convene people, agencies, and sectors, put weight behind a ‘common cause’, and collectively problem solve – as it did during the unprecedented times of Covid-19.

Throughout my time in local government, I worked with councillors and officials who were passionate about the people, places and communities they served. I saw leadership at all levels which was mission-led, devised innovative solutions to the wide-ranging, complex challenges faced by councils, and delivered outcomes for and with communities. They did this in the context of a rapidly declining resource base and ever-increasing demands for statutory services.

However, if we want ambitious, innovative system leadership to flourish, there are some key conditions that must be met:

1. Financial stability

The fiscal foundations of local government require urgent reform. Neither the council tax nor business rates systems are fit for purpose. The steady decline of progressive redistribution as a policy at national level, dependence on the local tax base, a council tax capping regime and tight restrictions on the use of revenues generated, have left places (in particular, places with higher levels of poverty) with less resources to meet need.

2. Parity of esteem

The new Government has made significant statements about the importance of local democracy. The commitment to extending devolution and the formation of a Local Government Leaders' Council is hugely welcomed. However, I don't underestimate the cultural change that will be required to move beyond 'earned autonomy' and 'assumed superiority' as an approach. A radical rethink is required if we are to achieve mature, effective multi-level governance in the UK.

3. Successful collaboration

Siloed working in professional, functional groupings and hierarchical working in local government remains a barrier to effective partnership working. Successful collaboration is built from relationships marked by mutualism, reciprocity, negotiation and compromise. People must be equipped and encouraged to share their expertise with those of different perspectives. Similarly, the lived experience and knowledge of front-line staff is too often overlooked and should be drawn upon as policy and programmes are developed.

4. A redesigned social contract

To transform life in the UK, I believe we must build common cause between people and communities, tapping into the collective wisdom and assets of a place, negotiating and managing tensions and aspirations, embracing opportunities and tackling challenges. As we do this, we move beyond the benevolent paternalism of the post-war settlement towards a new definition of citizenship and valuing of representative and participatory democracy.

Stronger together: modern city leadership in Sheffield



Cllr Tom Hunt
Leader, Sheffield
City Council
@tomhunt100

The privilege of city leadership is to be able to provide help for people today, and also make changes that will shape the city for decades to come. At Sheffield City Council, our mission is ‘Together, We Get Things Done’. It’s the name of our Council Plan because everything we do requires partnership working, whether that is tackling immediate pressures around homelessness or undertaking major long-term regeneration projects.

We see the Council’s role as ‘convenor of place’. Local government has a unique ability to bring people and partners together to seek to achieve shared outcomes and create conditions for future success. We know that tackling complex challenges is only possible with collaboration between local, regional and national government, all parts of the public sector, businesses, residents and the voluntary sector.

In 2022, Sheffield began a process to establish a set of City Goals; goals that would serve as our ‘North Stars’ to describe the city we want to be and the outcomes we want to achieve. Over 18 months, a conversation took place in the city. Thousands of people took part and the city adopted the goals earlier this year.

As important as the goals are the structures around them. New goals require new ways of working. This month we convened the Sheffield Stronger Together leadership group; senior leaders from anchor institutions, business and the voluntary sector who have come together to help shape the city’s work towards meeting our goals. Chaired by myself, and with cross-party representation, we are pioneering a new style of collaborative city leadership to use our collective resource, capacity and influence in pursuit of our goals.

City leadership requires being tactical and strategic. It requires moving quickly to tackle new challenges, but also staying on course with long-term plans to remove the barriers that hold people back. Moving our focus to early intervention and prevention is crucial to achieving this, but to make this shift, public services have to come together and work differently.

In underfunded and overstretched systems this can appear daunting, but leadership requires us to be optimistic, to be creative and to be willing to experiment and learn. That’s why our City Goals and the new collaborative, shared structures we are putting in place are critical. With a government that is serious about public sector reform, Sheffield stands ready to work together to get things done.



Beyond bureaucracy: achieving future-proof local government

How modern digital technology can help local authorities move “beyond bureaucracy”



James Johns
Head of Corporate
Affairs, Workday
[@JamesAJohns](#)

Local Government bodies in the UK are grappling with a multitude of challenges that are putting immense strain on their leadership and resources. Keeping pace with digital transformation, aligning resourcing and workforce capability, and operating within financial constraints alone would be challenging enough, yet the list goes on. Councils must deliver all the above whilst simultaneously addressing cybersecurity threats, pressures on housing and social care crises, demographic shifts, tackling climate change, and responding to potentially damaging shifts in public engagement and trust.

Adapting to and implementing new technologies is a key lever that local authorities could use to enhance service delivery and efficiency and equip themselves to meet these challenges. However, this is itself often hindered by fragmented technology portfolios and a lack of staff with the right skills. In many authorities, the systems and processes used to manage their two most important assets – their people and their money – are out of date and no longer fit for purpose. Yet at a time when the challenges have never been more acute, a series of well-publicised problem programmes has created an understandable reticence to contemplate change.

Workday pioneered AI-enabled, cloud-based enterprise software for finance, HR and planning, and our software is increasingly being used by public sector organisations around the world to help them adapt to citizens’ ever-rising expectations. Using

cloud-based software liberates resources that would otherwise be spent maintaining local IT infrastructures, protects against cyber attack, ensures systems are kept up to date, and enables organisations to benefit more easily from the latest features. Embracing the AI and Machine Learning features of tools like Workday can automate routine tasks, freeing up employees to focus on more strategic and citizen-centric work.

Moreover, contemporary systems for managing people can improve the experience of work itself, leading to a happier workforce and improved productivity. By digitally enabling HR processes, ‘from hiring to retiring’, software like Workday can help organisations identify and address skills gaps, while also connecting employees with opportunities that match their skills and ambitions, improving employee engagement and retention.

Embracing modern technology does however require many councils to develop ‘new muscle’. Getting the best out of today’s cloud-based software is often more about adopting than adapting new systems. The focus is often more on business change to embrace pre-built best-in-class processes, rather than commissioning custom automations of what’s always been done before.

Moving beyond bureaucracy needs a new mindset, a different approach to leadership, and the nurturing of new skills. But the returns are worth it, for the prize of future-proof local government.

Culture is the key to innovation in public services



Alison McKenzie-Folan
Chief Executive,
Wigan Council
@AlisonMc_F

I am delighted to be invited to speak at the 'Reimagining the Local State' conference and support the important work of *Reform*.

This is absolutely the right time to focus on innovation in local government as we look forward to what will be an exciting period for the sector, despite the many challenges we face.

The potential of digital technology and AI is for many the biggest opportunity in local government's corner as we strive to hit our budget targets and realise our ambitions over the coming decade.

At Wigan Council we have been on a journey of reflection and renewal over the past 18 months, with the aim of refreshing our strategic purpose. We have listened to our communities, and learned from our past, to build a new phase of reform to meet the challenges of today.

As a place partnership we have committed to two shared, borough-wide missions - to create fair opportunities for all children, families, residents and businesses, and make all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish.

At the centre of our plan to support these missions is the commitment to transform the way we operate through technology and AI, underpinned by data and insight. Having a

workforce culture where staff are up for sustained transformation is hard-won and, in Wigan, is the result of more than a decade of time and investment. Our culture gives all our staff permission to innovate and to do things in a different way if that is right for our residents and communities.

It is essential that all councils have leadership which creates innovative cultures, embraces the potential new technology can bring and apply it to improve outcomes for people's lives.

Our digital work in Wigan will help tackle inequalities through furthering digital inclusion in our communities and growing our digital economy. We will build digital confidence and capabilities within our workforce as well as improve the quality and utilisation of data and insight.

AI is already being used across our workforce by supporting the completion of administrative tasks so that we are able to invest human capacity in the relational public services that make such a difference to people's lives and communities.

The more digitally enabled we become the greater the shift will be to much more preventative public services. That cultural shift to prevention has to be embraced not just by local government, but by central government and all public services, if we are to avoid being in a position of continual crisis.

The route to local control and accountability



Angie Ridgwell
Chief Executive,
Hertfordshire
County Council
@AngieRidgwell

The image of local councils as stuffy bureaucracies couldn't be further from the truth. Hertfordshire County Council and local authorities across the country are dynamic, creative organisations focused on helping people and businesses to reach their full potential.

We are passionate about making a positive difference and we deliver a diverse range of life-enhancing services against significant headwinds with limited levers of control available to us. This constrains our ability to plan long term, maintain consistent services, and significantly, invest in prevention services to help people stay independent and resilient for longer.

Delivery of local services is largely deter-

mined by a triangle of three interdependencies: our statutory duties as set out in legislation, our outputs, and the resources available. At present central government has too much control over all three of these elements. Even when Whitehall purports to give us powers, the administrative and governance requirements conditional to the transfer create additional burdens on hard pressed staff.

Often, securing resources and freedoms from government requires a complex bidding process. For many, the process is unaffordable and for those who are unsuccessful it is a nugatory effort. Consequently, the system is skewed towards better resourced authorities which in turn may bake in increasing inequality. As well as reporting to government on multiple grants, there are also significant

accountability mechanisms, with currently over 550 data requirements for councils to satisfy.

Of course, the freedom to get on and deliver for our residents and businesses must sit alongside clear accountabilities. To this end, I support the government's intention to provide multi-year funding settlements to local government and the proposed review of the Office for Local Government's role and remit. But even with more agency over the financial and delivery sides of the triangle, ill-conceived legislation risks creating dysfunction.

It is essential that both local and central government understand the existing public sector

regulatory context that proposed new legislation will land in. For example, there is duplication between the functions of NHS Integrated Care Board and local authority Health and Wellbeing Boards. With clarity of purpose, central and local government can codesign solutions that deliver on our shared ambitions for our residents and drive out bureaucracy further downstream. From my experience many in Whitehall share this goal.

Councils offer taxpayers value for money; they are resourceful, innovative and above all resilient. Given real local control aligned to clear accountability we are well placed to deliver the new government's missions at a local level, enabling our residents and businesses to achieve their full potential.

Socitm's geography is always local



Carol Williams
Director,
Transformation
& Digital,
Walsall Council
& President, Socitm

The instinct to control is a strong one. But the only way for local places to thrive is to trust, collaborate, and hope. To be resilient. Allowing places the freedom to build on their strengths and collectively to overcome the challenges facing their communities. To reimagine service delivery within the unique setting and context of their place.

Confidence in local expertise and knowledge is vital. The solutions can be found in places and communities. But we can only be confident in what we do if we trust each other.

How do we tackle problems in our organisations and communities? With:

- Ambitious, concrete and cross-sectoral approaches
- Collaborations and partnerships improving outcomes for people and communities
- An emphasis on early intervention and prevention
- Bold goals providing a clear focus for long-term efforts.

We can make meaningful progress in this way. Grounded in the principles of mission-driven government, our 'People Make Places' approach sets out roles for place-based leadership, practical placemaking and connected places.

1. Place-based leadership - This means strong, collaborative, localised leadership. Leadership that understands the unique circumstances of its communities. Giving local leaders the means,

resources and authority is crucial. Together, they can tailor solutions reflecting the distinct needs of their areas.

2. Practical placemaking - This is more than infrastructure. It embraces creating spaces that are vibrant, inclusive and supportive of community wellbeing. Spaces that foster social interaction, cultural expression and economic activity. Places that enhance the quality of life for all residents and ensure all voices get heard.

3. Connected places - Technology can work as an enabler for those able to access and use it. This applies to us as service providers just as it does to the people using them.

Digital inequality covers a range of barriers (some self-imposed, some imposed on us). But creating an accessible digital infrastructure can support inclusivity and equal opportunities. Particularly for us in local authorities.

Being open to and using technology and automation – where and with who we can – frees us to focus on those who don't or can't find digital approaches easy.

For nearly 40 years, Socitm has been a strong player in supporting local public services with research, essential resources and know-how to harness innovation, technologies and data in pursuit of this goal.

Our members strive to improve the lives of people in the communities they serve: prioritising people and their unique community needs.

An opportunity for change



Oliver Coppard
Mayor, South Yorkshire
Combined Authority
@olivercoppard

Devolution should be used as an opportunity to change how we do politics.

Because the risks are all too clear if we fail to bring our communities together. If we do politics to people rather than with people.

In fact, greater devolution is the platform that will allow us to grow South Yorkshire's economy, attract investment, create more good jobs in the industries of the future and give people the opportunity to stay near and go far.

Mayors have the opportunity to be bold and brave, and our communities rightly expect nothing less of those they elect to lead. If devolution means anything, it has to mean bringing power closer to people, and showing that we can address those very real challenges that are impacting on people's lives here, now.

If we get devolution right, the potential opportunity is huge. It's how we bring services together, respond to the needs of our communities and shape our own future. It's how we give agency back to those people who all too often feel left out and left behind.

Chancellor Rachel Reeves' Budget represented a significant change in the way the Government will work with South Yorkshire and local leaders.

The integrated, departmental-style funding

settlement for South Yorkshire in 2026-27 will deepen devolution and allow us to align the priorities of South Yorkshire's communities with the way we spend our money.

Because, if we're going to deliver on the mission of growing all of the UK's economy, then we have to make the most of talent and ambition in every corner of the UK. Not just levelling-up, but powering up the economy of South Yorkshire and the whole of the North.

It is only by working together, at national and regional level, that we can turn things around, and we finally have that chance.

For example, we are already leading the way in addressing these barriers through the pioneering Pathways to Work Commission and we look forward to working with Government on the Get Britain Working white paper.

South Yorkshire, with our unique assets, expertise, and emerging industrial strategy, can play a vital role in our national renewal. We are leading the way across vital parts of the digital, health, and advanced manufacturing and the materials economy.

Across Barnsley, Rotherham, Doncaster and Sheffield we have been fixing the foundations for years. Now, with a Government that is working with us to deliver on our shared mission, we can restore the pride, purpose and prosperity of South Yorkshire.



Places: delivering the missions, transforming the State



Kate Josephs CB
Chief Executive,
Sheffield City Council
@katejosephs

Welcome to Sheffield - the 4th biggest city in England; an amazing place with unique neighbourhoods, more green space than any other city in the UK, thriving independent shops and a powerhouse cultural and creative sector. Our £15.7bn economy has major assets of global and national significance, attracting international companies including Boeing, Rolls Royce, and McLaren.

I'm delighted that the 'Reimagining the Local State' conference is taking place in Sheffield at a vital point for the future of our places and the state. Our country has a new, mission-driven Government who, through the recent Budget and launch of the Spending Review, have indicated their intention to drive long term change, public service reform and reshape the relationship between the national, regional and local state.

Places – like Sheffield - are where the Government's missions become real; where work on the ground can drive better outcomes for people, for the prosperity of our communities and for our planet. Over the last 15 years, the state has evolved significantly with a shift away from transactional services and a willingness to challenge a 'top down' paradigm; seeking solutions built with and designed with citizens.

We have a significant opportunity to lead reform and unlock growth *with* our communities, *with* our businesses, and as *one* public sector respecting and building the strengths of our places.

At the heart of a new approach needs to be a mindset shift, where we:

1. **Harness the collective leadership capabilities of the State** - creating genuine collective, collaborative leadership between national, regional and local; delivering Government's missions in a way that is empowering and respectful of place. The Government's Sheffield Policy Campus for example, presents a significant opportunity to demonstrate real collaboration and policy innovation at place level.

2. **Create the authorising environment in which we can all deliver** - if we want to drive fundamental reform of our public services, national government needs to focus on outcomes and enable services shaped around people and the diverse assets of our places. We need to create the authorising environment within which political and public leaders on the ground can drive real change that delivers for citizens and creates a more effective State.

3. **Capitalise on our convening powers to test and innovate** – there is an opportunity to use our place-level convening power to pilot, test and innovate in the first half of the parliament with the intention of establishing scalable models for long term public service change. This could include tackling key public service challenges linked to the Government's missions but also building the key enablers for long-term transformation including better using data and digital capabilities.

Our work

The ‘Reimagining the Local State’ programme is our response to the challenge in persuading central government to take local systems seriously and trust them with further powers. It is the next step in *Reform*’s work to scrutinise the foundational assumptions that underpin the British State. The programme develops policy ideas for the future of devolution, the role of communities, and the structures, practices, and leadership of local government itself

‘Reimagining the Local State’ sets out new thinking, explores approaches used in other countries, and convenes innovative problem-solvers from across England. It also promotes better central government understanding of, and engagement with, the priorities and opportunities that exist in our local places.

Please find our previous papers below:

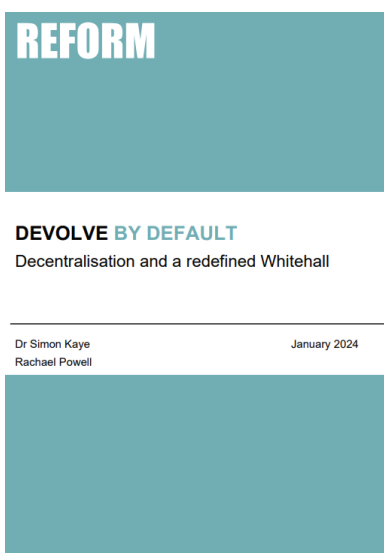
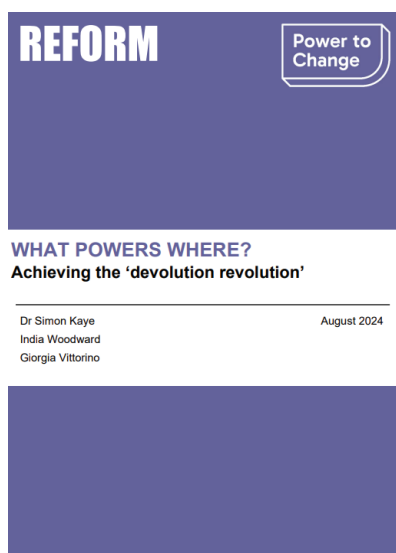
‘What powers where? Achieving the ‘devolution revolution’

This paper, kindly sponsored by Power to Change, is the first major policy report in *Reform*’s ‘Reimagining the Local State’ programme. It sets out design principles for local systems, recommendations for whole regional systems to work together and distribute powers at every scale. It also sets out the notional distribution of powers for a much more devolved system.

‘Devolve by default: Decentralisation and a redefined Whitehall’

This paper presents an analysis of the current barriers to effective devolution, identifying four ‘gaps’ between Whitehall’s expectations and its perception of local systems, which together prevent useful decentralisation.

Watch this space for our new major piece of research on local government finances!



Join us in 2025

As an educational charity, *Reform* produces robust, evidence-led research with innovative but implementable policy solutions; and we convene reform-minded people from across the political spectrum to advance open debate and generate fresh thinking.

In a nutshell, we are home to bold ideas and big conversations.

We bring together like-minded individuals and organisations who share our commitment to finding innovative solutions to public policy challenges. Our Corporate Partnership programme is part of this impactful network.

We value the commitment of our partners very highly. We pride ourselves on building strong and mutually beneficial relationships, and work with our partners so they can get the most out of joining our network.

To find out more, please contact sylvie.macdonald@reform.uk.



