

Re:State

Re:Imagining the Local State

Tuesday 25 November 2025

Liverpool

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beam

Agenda

09.30 – 10.00	Registration and refreshments
10.00 – 10.10	Welcome and introduction Charlotte Pickles, Director, <i>Re:State</i>
10.10 – 11.00	Opening interactive session: Taking the temperature of the Local State To open the day, <i>Re:State</i> 's Policy Director Dr Simon Kaye will lead a fast-paced interactive session using live polls and audience discussion to gauge the room's views on the future of the local state. This quick collective "temperature check" will set up the key themes that will run through the keynotes and panels ahead.
11.00 – 12.00 In partnership with 	Panel one – Transformed councils, revolutionised services It is a time of rapid change for local government. Swathes of councils are embarking on an ambitious wave of structural reorganisation. Even in cities or unitaries untouched by this process, a major shift is surely needed. To improve outcomes in the midst of change, councils will need to embrace innovative practice from a multitude of sources. This panel will discuss the ingredients needed – in terms of policy, culture, partnerships, and structure – for game-changing innovations in local public services. Rachel Astall, Chief Customer Officer, Beam Cllr Liam Robinson, Leader, Liverpool City Council Robin Tuddenham, President, Solace and Chief Executive, Calderdale Council
12.00 – 12.45	In conversation with Sir Richard Leese Sir Richard Leese CBE, Chair of the Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board and former Leader of Manchester City Council
12.45 – 13.30	Break for lunch
13.30 – 14.15	Keynote address Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the Liverpool City Region
14.15 – 15.15 In partnership with 	Panel two – Democratising Devolution: Can devolution bridge the democratic deficit? With local representation being reshaped through council reorganisation, shifts underway to electoral systems across the local state, and the continued rise of strategic authorities, these questions of mandate, legitimacy, and citizen power are becoming ever more important. This panel will explore how devolution might not only reshape formal governance but also create the conditions for a deeper renewal of democratic participation. Cllr Matthew Brown, Leader, Preston City Council and Senior Fellow, Democracy Collaborative Irenie Ekkeshis, Co-Founder and Director, The New Citizen Project Adam Lang, Director of Policy, Insight and Advocacy, Carnegie UK Heather Jameson, Editor, <i>The Municipal Journal</i>
15.15 – 15.30	Closing remarks Dr Simon Kaye, Policy Director, <i>Re:State</i>

Our mission

Almost 18 months on, and the optimism that a new Government with a large majority could fix the public realm has disappeared. That is in part, of course, because Britain continues to face era-defining challenges: geopolitical tensions and risks, an ageing and increasingly sick population, sluggish growth and crumbling infrastructure, and deep polarisation and distrust. But it is also because, in large part, the new Government is trying to fix things with the same tools, and within the same structures, as the previous one.

At *Re:State*, we have long been making the case for more fundamental reform. The public service institutions and approaches we rely on – modified versions of those built as part of the post-war settlement – are no longer fit for purpose. The challenges that faced 1940s Britain are not those of today. If the challenges we face are era-defining, our response must be too. The PM is right, we must rewire the State.

In practice, 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 'Re:Imagining 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 'Re:Imagining 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.



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Our team



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The revolution is happening – now we have to get it right



Dr Simon Kaye
Policy Director,
Re:State

English local government is being remade at dizzying speed. A new strategic tier is being rolled out across the country, every remaining two-tier area is being pushed towards reorganisation, and major changes are looming in planning, local finance, and local funding.

The direction of travel is clear: bigger footprints – though perhaps still not big enough in some places! – more powerful strategic institutions, and an expectation that local government will drive both economic renewal and public service reform.

Moments like this do not come around often. Decisions taken now about geography, governance and accountability will surely be locked in for a generation.

These are decisions which could entrench a local state that is even more distant and technocratic. Or they could open the door to a more self-governing country, with power and responsibility distributed more intelligently between the national, regional, local and hyperlocal scales. The same reforms that create much larger councils can also be the point at which we design serious routes for local people to shape what happens in their places.

Representation on the ground is already shifting. Reorganisation will mean fewer councillors, by an order of magnitude, than before – all while public expectations of local leadership rise. An average member of the public will still, more than likely, struggle to remember the name of their councillor under these new arrangements.

At the same time, strategic authorities and directly mandated leaders are emerging as a new class of powerful local politicians – a class whose role is still evolving. They bring clarity of leadership and a visible figure to deal with, but they also pull big decisions up to a population scale of 1.5 million – a level at which individual

neighbourhoods may struggle to make themselves heard.

Below this, the map is full of gaps. Much of England still lacks any universal, formalised hyperlocal tier of governance. Other systems of public services are run with little reference to councils. A system that keeps asking more of local government, without fixing this fracture between institutions and communities, risks compounding an already serious democratic deficit.

This will also have implications for the future of our local public services, and the tacit social contract upon which these rest. Demands on the local state are only intensifying. Councils and Strategic Authorities are being asked to catalyse investment, steward major regeneration, and reshape public services around prevention and place – often while managing acute financial pressures and inherited structural problems.

If these reforms are to succeed, structural change cannot be treated as a purely technical exercise in drawing new boundaries and merging organisations. It has to be accompanied from day one by a commitment to smarter commissioning, experimentation at the frontline, and new forms of collaboration with communities themselves.

This is therefore not just a story about institutional design, but about legitimacy. Devolution that simply reshuffles power among distant institutions will not endure. Devolution that helps to renew participation, rebuild trust, and give people a stake in the decisions that shape their places might.

The question for this moment in the debate is whether England can seize that chance – and whether any settlement that fails to do so can really claim to be complete.

Taking charge of Liverpool's future



Steve Rotheram
Mayor of the Liverpool
City Region

Few places can claim to have shaped the modern world quite like the Liverpool City Region.

For centuries, our people have led the way – from the first commercial wet dock and intercity passenger railway to revolutionising music, culture, and sport. We've never been content to stand still, and we're not about to start now.

Today, we're continuing that legacy of innovation with a clear mission: to build a stronger, fairer, and greener economy, powered by our people and rooted in our communities.

We're playing to our strengths – in life sciences, advanced manufacturing, digital connectivity and clean energy – but we're also doing something more radical: making sure those strengths translate into real opportunity for every resident, in every part of the region.

Our experience shows that when local and national government work together, everyone feels the benefits. We know the opportunities and challenges facing our areas far better than anyone in Westminster or Whitehall ever could. By giving power to those who know their communities best, we are delivering better outcomes, stronger public trust, and greater value for money.

Devolution has given areas like ours the tools to take charge of our own future – and we've shown what that can mean in practice. Over the past few years, we've secured more than £2bn in investment, helped more than 60,000 people into work, and built 32,000 new homes.

We've rolled out the UK's first publicly owned trains in a generation, taken decisive steps to bring buses back under public control, and delivered the country's biggest gigabit-capable digital network.

These achievements are all the result of local people making local decisions to improve lives.

But what comes next is bigger and even more ambitious. We're developing a world-class Life Sciences Innovation Zone that will create thousands of high-value jobs. We're leveraging Freeport status to unlock global trade.

And we're spearheading the green industrial revolution – from Mersey Tidal to hydrogen and wind – all in pursuit of a net zero future by 2035.

Ultimately, though, devolution isn't about shiny buildings, labs or transport schemes – it's unlocking potential and giving people the tools to shape their own futures. Every investment we make has a bigger purpose: creating good jobs, raising living standards and giving our 1.6 million residents the chance to share in the benefits of success.

This is a place people want to live, work and visit. Vibrant culture, world-class universities, new homes, and a unified vision shared by political, business, and civic leaders make the Liverpool City Region a powerhouse of progress.

To everyone joining us at *Re:State*: welcome! This is a region with its sleeves rolled up and its eyes on the future. We've shown what's possible when power is in the right hands – and we're only just getting started.

A resurgent Manchester



Sir Richard Leese CBE
Chair, Greater Manchester
Integrated Care Board
and former Leader, Manchester
City Council

Forty years ago Manchester was a dying old, industrial city and its decline had already been going on for probably six or more decades. By contrast, since the turn of the century it has consistently had rates of economic growth faster than the national average, faster than the south-east, though, with productivity still around 25% below London and the south-east, we should not delude ourselves that Manchester is “done”.

This hasn't happened by accident, and though by no means an exhaustive list, here are some of the vital ingredients behind the city's relative success.

It takes time. The seeds for success were sown in the mid-1980s with economic pragmatism in the City Council, and with the creation of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities out of the embers of the County Council providing a basis for co-operation across geographies and across political parties. Even so, it was 20 years before the first fully formed devolution proposal was discussed with government, and it's worth noting that the single biggest element of that proposal, the full devolution of post-16 skills funding, including apprenticeships, has still to be achieved. It's also worth noting that AGMA recognised the need for a new statutory body to exercise devolved powers, and if this was the conception of the Combined Authority, then it would never have been born without cross-party support in GM.

Geography matters. Greater Manchester is a reasonable approximation to its functional economic area, the ideal basis for much strategic economic planning. Given the importance of the relationship between economic and social policy, GM also benefits from co-terminosity of a whole range of public services, and this has been central to the public service reform model developed in the

last decade. However, if GM is the strategic level, delivery is still largely a Council level responsibility, and some things need to be done on a bigger footprint, for example the creation of Rail North, designed to mirror the two northern rail franchises.

Scale matters. A modern economy is driven by access to a large, skilled workforce. Operating on a city-region footprint has allowed GM to invest in a vastly improved and better integrated public transport network, increasing both the availability of skilled workers, and the ability of those workers to access good jobs. Scale, coupled with devolution, has also allowed GM to deploy significant financial instruments, not least the Housing Investment Fund, operated as revolving investment funds, spending the same money several times over.

Economic planning has to be rooted in reality. Too many local economic plans are just wishful thinking, often backed with lovely, glossy CGIs and drafted to satisfy unachievable political aspirations. Since the Manchester Independent Economic Review in 2008, Manchester's economic strategy has been backed by hard evidence on where the opportunities for growth lie, and has been translated into robust, long-term investment and delivery plans.

Quality of life matters. High skill businesses have workers who can choose where they want to live – Manchester's work on the night-time economy, on city-centre and increasingly town-centre living are just some examples of how you can create a place where people want to live. That Manchester is the only city that has invested in arts and culture year in, year out, for the last three decades, has a direct impact on its economic trajectory, because after all, who wants to live in a city without culture.

Transformed councils, revolutionised services

Building trust in AI from the ground up



Rachel Astall
Chief Customer Officer,
Beam

English local government is undergoing its biggest transformation in decades. With it comes an opportunity to rethink how services are designed and delivered. At the same time, rapid advances in AI are reshaping what's possible.

Councils have already embraced change at remarkable speed. More than 100 local authorities and 50,000 frontline practitioners use Beam's AI tool, Magic Notes, to reduce admin and free up staff time for better quality support.

These twin shifts – in governance and technology – could unlock huge gains in efficiency and responsiveness. But they also pose a challenge: how do we innovate at pace while maintaining public trust? The answer lies in how we bring people into the process of change.

Local participatory democracy in action

Beam partnered with Nesta on their AI Social Readiness Advisory label process – an innovative model to measure public confidence and trust in specific tools.

Nesta's process used a structured approach known as deliberative polling, which involves small-group sessions to review an issue, weigh the benefits versus the risks, and form considered opinions.

The groups were made up of people currently accessing social care services as well as the general public, ensuring the potential impact on service users was central to the discussion. 97% of people agreed the process was a good way of involving the public in decisions about AI.

Practical insights

The findings showed that the public are excited about the potential of AI in public service, as long as it is carefully thought through.

In the case of Magic Notes, 86% of the public felt that this tool would benefit the social care process, and praised its ability to reduce the administrative burdens and inefficiencies in social care.

However, for participation to realise genuine democratisation, it must be more than consultative – it must be actionable. The process drew out key areas of focus, including the importance of data security, ongoing staff training and the involvement of both the public and service users in decision making. We also heard new ideas for where technology could make a difference to public services.

For Beam, it was reassuring to see such clear alignment between what we're working on and what the public considers important.

A model for trust and legitimacy

This process not only deepened public understanding of AI in local services but led to a 12% increase in trust that the public sector will use it responsibly.

Genuine democratisation happens when people are invited into the process of change. This approach showed that the public is eager to participate, and capable of shaping practical, balanced recommendations that can improve public services.

In many ways, it offers a model for testing change itself. As local government undergoes its biggest transformation in decades, and technology evolves just as fast, both can learn from this kind of open, participatory approach.

By building trust into every stage of innovation, we can ensure both reforms deliver on their shared promise: a more connected and people-centred local state.

Liverpool City Council is on an improvement journey



Cllr Liam Robinson
Leader, Liverpool
City Council

Every local authority is facing unprecedented demand for demand-led services we are legally obliged to provide, such as children's and adult social care and homelessness. This means we have to make the most of every pound we spend.

In Liverpool, we have been taking a forensic approach to redesigning our services to respond to different community and neighbourhood-level needs that support better outcomes for everyone. This approach is a radical change in the way we work together and ensures we have joined up, data-informed and prevention-focused services. This approach will be delivered in partnership with public, private and third sector organisations to align resources, attract funding and create more resilient, protective, and better quality places to live in.

We have been supported in our vision by the Government, who we have been working with on a number of test and learn pilot projects. This has included using data and internal control processes to improve decision making and service quality for people in need of temporary accommodation; reducing persistent absence in schools; working at a local level to support children with respiratory issues; and a project to improve the lives of young people by helping them thrive academically, socially, and professionally as they grow up.

We have also used our local Strategic Partnership – comprising 21 anchor organisations employing more than 60,000 people with spending power of over £5 billion – to create the Liverpool 2040 plan, which sets out an overarching framework

to foster greater collaborations across key organisations to make us the UK's leading city of opportunity.

Alongside this, we have developed a neighbourhood model that works on a geographical footprint of 13 areas across the city, reflecting new ward boundaries and 'natural neighbourhoods'. The aim is to bridge the gaps created by historic siloed ways of working and improve visibility and understanding of residents' needs in each neighbourhood, so we can respond to complex issues in a coordinated way both across the council and with partners. The model is supported by Neighbourhood Managers, who are able to bring together partners, data and community insight. They enable us to better understand the challenges and opportunities in each area, feeding their local knowledge into wider strategies and plans, and working with councillors to identify key issues and priorities.

When it comes to frontline service delivery, we are implementing a customer experience improvement plan built on three clear principles: keeping it simple, making it personal, and showing that we care. This includes making the best use of our staff and buildings by enabling residents to have queries answered or escalated in our libraries, and investing in modernising our back-office systems so they are kept informed about the progress we are making in resolving issues they have reported.

Our ambition is to become one of the best performing local authorities in the country, delivering efficient, value-for-money services. It is no less than our residents deserve.

A new era of public leadership



Robin Tuddenham
President, Solace and
Chief Executive, Calderdale
Council

As we convene ahead of what is set to be a crucial Budget for not just the Government but the country and its people, I am struck by the urgency and opportunity of this moment – a moment to reflect on both the strategic role of local government in shaping the future of public service delivery, and in driving economic growth.

At Solace we have been clear for a while now that the scale of the challenges we face – from fiscal constraints to rising demand – means continuing with incremental change simply will not do. The situation we all now find ourselves in demands a fundamental shift in how we design, lead, and evaluate public services.

I am convinced that the future of public service lies not in transactional delivery but in relational practice where empathy, ethics, and deep listening guide how we work with communities. In seeking to describe and implement transformation, there has been a tendency to privilege process and systems, particularly in relation to the opportunities through digital and agentic AI. But it is our view in Solace that relational practice, based upon human learning, systems thinking and evolving evidence, will enable us to move beyond transactional approaches which treat people as cases or numbers.

It means recognising the complexity of lives and designing services that respond with humanity and flexibility. This is not soft leadership. It is courageous, values-driven, and grounded in the realities people face every day.

Councils are uniquely placed to lead this shift, because we are embedded in place. We know our communities and we are trusted, often more than any other part of the public sector. But trust must be earned and sustained. That is why leadership today must be ethical, transparent, and inclusive. We must be willing to challenge the status quo, to ask difficult questions, and to co-create solutions with a whole host of partners but especially those we serve.

The temptation to retreat into risk-averse, siloed thinking is real. But the answer and, in my view, the only way out of the many challenges we face lies in bold reform, not

retrenchment. I have said before, and will continue to say, that we must revisit the principles of Total Place so that we can reimagine public service in a way that is collaborative, efficient, and deeply local. And as we do this, we must also harness what I call the “empathy advantage” of local government; our ability to connect, convene, and care.

Policymakers have a critical role to play in enabling this bold transformation, by creating the conditions for councils to lead through new and flexible funding arrangements, devolved powers, and a regulatory environment that supports innovation. It also means investing in leadership development across the sector, ensuring that those at the helm of local government are equipped to navigate complexity and drive change.

I am hugely encouraged by the developing thinking and practice taking place across the ten leading local authorities piloting the Cabinet Office’s approach to Test, Learn and Grow. The ethos of starting now and being receptive to disruption, whilst focusing on trialling new approaches to the big and fundamental challenges we face in public services – like worklessness, early years, and homelessness – offers hope we should seize, and actions whose impact we must amplify.

Solace is committed to supporting this journey. We are working to strengthen leadership capability, foster ethical governance, and promote a culture of continuous innovation and ‘informed disruption.’ We are investing in leadership development, championing innovation, and advocating for a renewed focus on bold, place-based reform with comprehensive learning and development programmes and seminars impacting 1800 senior professionals in the sector in the last six months alone.

As we look ahead, let us be ambitious. Let us design services that are not only effective but also compassionate. Let us seize this moment to reimagine public service, not as a system of silos but as a network of relationships. Let us lead with courage, collaborate with purpose, and build a future that is both visionary and rooted in the lived experience and everyday lives of the people we serve.

Democratising Devolution: Can devolution bridge the democratic deficit?

Democracy and delivery at the local level



Heather Jameson
Editor, *The Municipal Journal*

Working in and around political environments it is easy to forget a basic truth: voters think about democracy far less than politicians do.

The ongoing local government obsession with democracy may have hit an all-time high as reorganisation pushes power further away from the people it serves, while devolution supposedly brings it closer than the distant world of Westminster.

But while councils pour over structures and contemplate how to connect with their communities, out in the real world the politics is turning people off. The political point-scoring so beloved in the Westminster bubble has left us with an electorate that is willing to vote for anyone... as long as they are not a politician.

The political geeks among us may pontificate over the demise of democracy, but are we really in crisis? Or is the right to reject the politics on offer the very point of democracy?

I'd argue that democracy is not dead so much as the demise of shouting loudly from the sidelines and being utterly ignored. The quick fix slogans of populist politics and modern manifestos, vowing to take back control, stop the boats or freeze taxes for working people, have failed to deliver results. Is it any wonder the electorate is disenchanted?

So what does this mean for devolution? The argument for directly-elected mayors and devolved government has always been about reinvigorating democracy and bringing power out of Westminster and to the people. But is the risk we are giving people more politicians when they want less? The antidote to apathy and anger over our politics is not simply to create more structures, but rather to make political decisions that improve people's lives.

The value of politicians is not the structures or the powers; it is what they do – and that is highly dependent on the quality of the politicians.

Mayors will not matter just because they have powers. They will matter if they use those powers to improve employment, housing, skills and transport – if they improve life chances and give local people a better standard of living.

Newly formed unitary authorities will not be about the structures, the population size or the functional economic geography. They will be about delivering the best possible services and the ability to engage local people in services – about listening to what local people want, delivering and demonstrating they have delivered.

In short it needs quality politicians who think less about democracy and chasing votes, and more about delivering.

Seizing the moment: Why it's time for a participatory culture shift within local government



Irenie Ekkeshis
Co-Founder and Director,
New Citizen Project

Local government is in flux. Shrinking budgets, shifting responsibilities, and rising expectations are forcing councils to rethink how they work. Top-down models of service delivery are no longer fit for the world we live in. Progress surely now depends on giving communities power and space to shape their own places.

Reorganisation and all that comes with it also brings an opportunity: to build stronger relationships with citizens and to tap into the knowledge, energy and creativity that already exist in every community.

But our experience is that culture hasn't caught up. Whilst we've seen that some brilliant community-first initiatives have emerged – from citizens' assemblies and participatory budgeting to co-produced services – they're too often at the fringes. Standalone projects, powered by one-off funding streams.

In councils, siloed working and a very powerfully entrenched 'service provider' mindset is part of business as usual. Innovative participatory initiatives are admired but not replicated. The teams who deliver these exciting projects move on or move elsewhere. Meanwhile, everything carries on as before. This is holding councils back.

Until the culture changes participatory approaches will struggle to take root, and the full potential of working with citizens will stay locked away.

So perhaps this is the moment. As councils across the UK are redesigning how they will work, now is the time to shift the culture wholesale towards working *with* citizens rather than just delivering services *for* them.

We can draw inspiration from so many examples of good practice, from participatory budgeting in Newham to a new social contract in Wigan, demonstrating exactly how participatory working can support community resilience, bolster the legitimacy of decisions, more effectively manage resources, and increase staff motivation.

But a bit of structure can also help. At New Citizen Project, we've been experimenting with a framework for culture change that we co-developed working with teams at Kirklees, and then Waltham Forest, Westmorland and Furness, and South Gloucestershire over the last couple of years. This model has been actively tested, in environments familiar to most councils in the UK. And from the feedback we've had from those councils and their leaders, we know it has potential.

The framework consists of three key components, and we think it's a recipe for cultural reinvention at councils:

- Narrative – Articulating a new story about the participatory culture shift you want to achieve
- Rituals – Bringing your narrative to life through intentional everyday practices
- Totems – Embodying it through attention-grabbing initiatives that others can see

We've learnt that it's not just executive teams that can shape culture. With the right structure and a bit of support, it can start from anywhere.

So whatever your role in local government, now's the time to seize this moment and make the participatory culture shift.

Only real economic democracy will make a difference



Cllr Matthew Brown
Leader, Preston City Council
and Senior Fellow,
Democracy Collaborative

When we talk about local democracy, we usually reach for the language of powers, boundaries, and ballots. I welcome all of that: more resources for councils, deeper devolution deals, directly-elected mayors in every part of England.

But if our question is “why is public trust declining?” or “why is the local democratic deficit growing?” the answer is not only about structures. We are missing something fundamental. A lot of our real, everyday democratic say has quietly drained away because our economies have become less diverse and less rooted in place.

If you do not have much control over your job, your landlord, your high street, or your energy bills, it is no surprise if you feel you do not have much control over local politics or policy either. You simply do not have enough ‘skin in the game.’

Disempowered local government and hollowed-out local economies go hand in hand. They help explain why people do not turn out, and why our politics sometimes feels so polarised.

For more than a decade, the ‘Preston Model’ has been our attempt to put economic democracy back at the heart of local democracy. It is a form of Community Wealth Building, which means it is about who owns the economy, who benefits from it, and who gets more of a say.

This works when we make use of the tools we have – like procurement, regeneration, and partnerships – in a unique way. We have worked to redirect public spending through local firms and suppliers. We support small business hubs, promote the real living wage, and are expanding democratic ownership through regional co-operative banking, community land trusts, municipal enterprise, worker

owned businesses and community energy. Crucially, we do not think it is right to do any of this unilaterally, or by ourselves as a council. We work closely with our local anchor institutions – the university, the hospital, major public bodies, alongside local businesses, unions, and civil society to support similar strategies whenever possible.

The result, when it works, is an approach that is radical and pragmatic at the same time. We are not waiting for a perfect new model of local government to emerge. We are using the powers we have to give people more control over their economic lives as well as adding fresh components of a democratic economy. My belief is other kinds of local democracy will flow from and be strengthened by that.

We see the potential elsewhere. In some small regions of Spain and Italy, at least 30 per cent of local businesses are co-operatives. Across parts of the United Kingdom, Europe, New Zealand, South Korea and even in America’s rust belt, Community Wealth Building and new forms of ownership are taking root. In New York and other US cities, politicians are advocating economic agendas that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. There is massive appetite for a new way of doing things.

Reorganisation raises many questions for the future of our local democracies. From an economic democracy perspective, there is a potential opportunity in reorganisation, but only if we get it right. A new unitary at the scale of around 350,000 and encompassing a rational economic geography could have the assets and leverage to go further and faster with this agenda, empowering more people.

Putting more of our local and regional economies into the hands of working people and the community is not a utopian dream. It is the next, necessary step in renewing local democracy itself.

A reimagined state with wellbeing at the heart of decision making



Adam Lang
Director of Policy,
Insight and Advocacy,
Carnegie UK

Across the country local government is being asked to do more with less. With diminished funding and stretched resources, councils in England are being asked to meet rising demand at a time of major structural reform. This difficult context offers an opportunity to rethink what the local state is for and how it measures success. Realising this opportunity will require imagination and ambition.

At Carnegie UK, we work to put wellbeing at the heart of government decision-making. We believe this offers both a governing ideology and practical approaches that are grounded in what matters to people and places, and that actively embraces the difficult policy trade-offs required to make a difference to people's lives. This model is centred around five enablers of improved collective wellbeing:

Measuring what matters

What gets measured is what gets done. Or so the saying goes. But traditional economic or service output indicators don't tell us much about whether people feel secure, connected, healthy or hopeful – the things that really describe thriving communities. A collective wellbeing approach to measuring what matters combines economic, social, environmental and democratic outcomes to help understand if people's lives are really improving. At Carnegie UK we have piloted an approach to this with our annual Life in the UK index, which seeks to understand the nation's collective wellbeing. By working to measure what matters in a more robust, cohesive and recurring way, councils and local government can better understand the policy interventions that are needed to help communities thrive.

Wellbeing policy frameworks

Measurement is, however, only the first step. Embedding wellbeing in policymaking requires frameworks that guide decisions and resource allocation from strategy to delivery. The National Performance Framework in Scotland and the

Well-being of Future Generations Act in Wales show how this can be done at scale. At a local level, similar frameworks can help to align departments, partners and communities around shared outcomes. They encourage collaboration rather than competition between services – for example, recognising that investing in housing can improve health, learning and local communities simultaneously. A coherent wellbeing framework marshalled around a shared vision and underpinned with local indicators can give councils a compass to help guide difficult policy trade-offs when resources are tight.

Giving people voice and choice

At a fundamental level, reimagining the local state is also about power. A wellbeing approach starts with the belief that people themselves are often best placed to define what matters in their communities. This means expanding participation beyond traditional consultation through deliberative forums, participatory budgeting, and co-production of services. When local people have real voice and choice over the decisions that impact them, policymaking becomes both fairer and more effective. But this shift cannot be achieved by one off interventions or gimmicks. To really rebuild trust and a sense of local connection requires a fundamental rethink as to how we continuously empower and embed democratic engagement.

Wellbeing in local budgeting

If budgets express priorities, then wellbeing must shape how money is spent. Some combined and local authorities are piloting outcomes-based budgeting, where financial decisions are tested against their expected contribution to established wellbeing outcomes that cut across traditional siloes. This approach can reveal opportunities for prevention, not just crisis responses, for example by investing in green spaces or community anchor institutions as ways to reduce pressure on health and social care services. A wellbeing approach to budgeting is ultimately about aligning public money

Our work

The 'Re:Imagining 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 *Re:State'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.

'Re:Imagining 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 a selection of our most recent papers below. All papers can be found on our website.

New house rules: the case for devolving Homes England

This paper makes the case for abolishing Homes England and devolving the majority of its powers and functions down to Mayoral Strategic Authorities.

Go big or go home: governing England's polycentric regions

This paper is the third and final paper in our regionalism series. It sets out a plan to introduce Provinces, a new form of regional government led by directly-elected Governors and covering geographies of at least three million people, outside of England's six largest cities. These would have the size, coherence and authority necessary to take on real strategic leadership.

It follows *Metromentum*, which examined ways Strategic Authorities could be more decisive, accountable and capable, and *Rebooting regionalism*, which explains the need for a genuinely strategic regional tier of government.

Local, actually: establishing hyperlocal governance in England

This paper outlines a practical framework for 'filling in the map' of hyperlocal government. It argues that strengthening this tier of government is key to ensuring that every community has a credible and representative input into the decisions that affect them.



NEW HOUSE RULES
The case for devolving Homes England

Sean Eke
Cory Berman
Dr Simon Kaye

September 2025



GO BIG OR GO HOME
Governing England's polycentric regions

Dr Simon Kaye
Sean Eke

July 2025



LOCAL, ACTUALLY
Establishing hyperlocal governance in England

Dr Simon Kaye
India Woodward

April 2025



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As an educational charity, *Re:State* 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 beth.bradbury@re-state.co.uk



