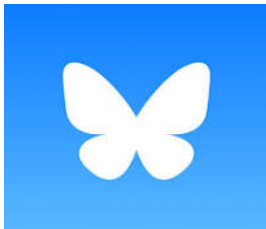




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APSE Central Seminar and AGM 2026

Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution - What does it mean for Local Authority Parks and Open spaces?

- Funding issues for neighbourhood level services
- What powers and responsibilities will sit with combined and mayoral authorities? What remains at a council level?
- With new neighbourhood funding and neighbourhood boards protect our local parks assets?

How do we fare compared to Europe on municipality size?

- The average number of inhabitants per municipality on an EU average is 22,455
- Outliers with hyperlocal fragmented systems Czechia (1,710 inhabitants on average), France (1,928) and Slovakia (1,865)

Intermediate layer of government (and governance)

- Most organise within a multi-layered system. What works where and at what size?
- Where we see 'highly consolidated municipal systems' (by which in EU terms this is circa 60,000 residents) the sub-regional or regional tier will provide specialist functions.
- Eg Netherlands average under 60,000 but regions of around 1.2 million.



UK ... distance from the people.....



Protecting frontline services? Does distance matter?

Remote services and loss of institutional knowledge? What are the lessons from outsourcing?

When services are outsourced explicit knowledge is the driver and a core component in the contracting arrangements. In reality the loss of tacit or less explicit knowledge is often devastating to delivery. Think outsourced call centres? Loss of 'post code' knowledge etc

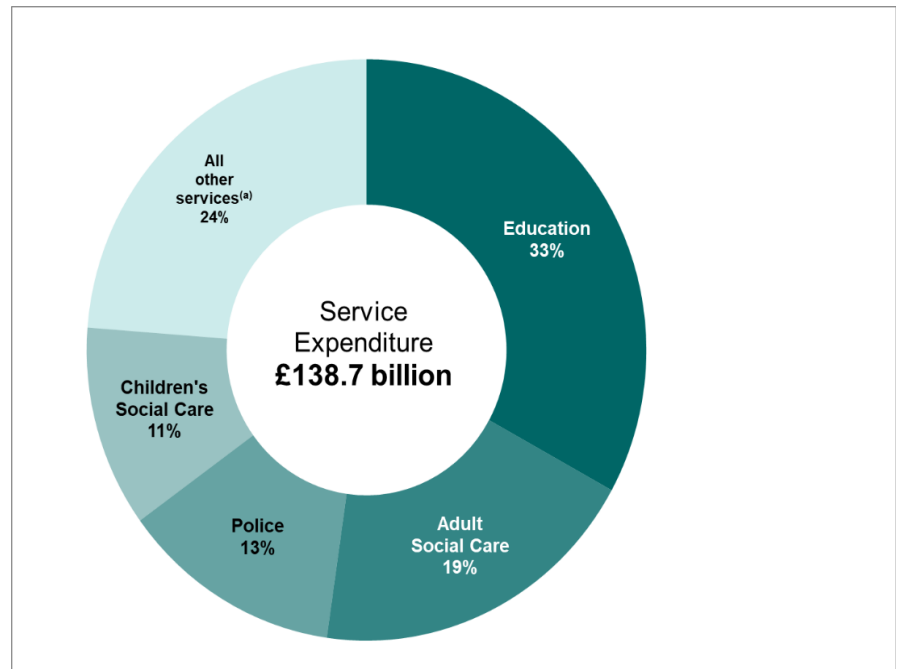
Services often thrive on tacit knowledge. *'Do X or Y because Mr Miggins has a specific need'*. How will this be maintained in bigger more remote councils?

What are the mechanisms in reorganised councils for tacit knowledge or services to be maintained, shared and built upon?

What type or arrangements do managers wish to see thrive under new service delivery arrangements?

Balancing financial sustainability with service resilience and public trust.

- According to the Kings Fund around **1.4%** of the adult population in England (about 683,000 people) rely on publicly funded, long-term adult social care.
- For people aged over 65 this is around **5.2%**
- Working age adults that figure is just **0.9%**



The Unitary Problem....

- Balance of social care spend compared to 'all other services'
- Other pressures on SEND, homelessness provision and housing need
- Level of indebtedness on local councils £120 Billion – up 7% in 2025
- Legacy debt transfers
- Parks can ill afford more constraints on funding

Protecting frontline (neighbourhood) service spend?

- Knowing the data; what is the current cumulative spend?
- What service levels are in place? What do different residents expect?
- What are the harmonisation issues on the frontline workforce?
- How do you assess delivery model efficacy and harmonise future delivery?

What's the plan?



Pre-merger parks champions!

- A real role for councillors to ensure that there are upfront commitments on frontline services
- Don't allow neighbourhood level services to be at the 'back of the queue' on service development, AI and digital transformation!
- Stability will matter to residents. Day 1 delivery will have to continue

Service Delivery

- 'New' to some services
- Merger of multiple services
- Capacity
- Models of delivery – outsourced models – do they give rise to opportunities to insource?
- Systems and operational delivery – resolving conflicts

Opportunities?

- Reform to public procurement. The Public Interest Test and Insourcing. New Guidance (June 2026).
- Social Value and weightings
- Local supply chains
- Service integration



A shift to prevention, efficiency and AI

- Retiring legacy systems and data integration
- AI to work smarter and release resources where needed
- Using data to understand what drives demand
- Doing things differently should mean doing things better!

Assets, Efficiencies and Optimal Efficiency

- What existing assets do you have?
- What parks and public realm will form the basis of a new Unitary council?
- Reviewing the property and asset register
- ‘Service assets’ such as depots
- Rationalisation? Sell-offs? Refurbish or Repurpose?
- Can efficiencies be realised?

Optimal Efficiency

- Optimal efficiency = Reducing waste and scaling production to match demand.
- But.....not as simply as economies of scale in some aspects of service delivery
- Care needed not to create more inefficient or ineffective delivery of services

Thinking about the future of your parks

- What models of delivery do you currently operate under and what about the new Unitary?
- Are contracts coming to a natural end?
- Do you have capacity in one council to insource?
- What is the budget position?
- What are the maintenance regimes?
- What about working hours and practices?
- What about policies on biodiversity? Climate change?



Devolution and Community Empowerment Act

Implications for council parks teams

Do powers risk shifting to strategic authorities?

English Devolution – Overview

- Focus on empowering local leaders through devolution deals
- Emphasis on green infrastructure, climate resilience, and health
- Aims to streamline decision-making and integrate funding
- Strategic authorities will assume broader strategic control
- *“Finally, we will expand Strategic Authorities’ role in leading Local Nature Recovery Strategies”* - Greater powers, responsibilities, and resources to coordinate environmental planning at a regional scale.

Potential risks for council parks teams

Centralisation at strategic authority level

- Strategic control over green infrastructure may shift regionally
- Local influence over biodiversity or regeneration priorities could weaken

Loss of direct funding streams

- New regional investment models may centralise budgets
- Risk of reduced autonomy for city-level projects

Distance from decision-making

- Parks teams may have less influence on region-wide strategies
- Risk of misalignment with community needs

Factors that mitigate the risk / Opportunities

Devolution deals are negotiated locally

- Councils help shape powers and roles in each region

Councils retain operational control

- Park maintenance and delivery remain local responsibilities

Opportunity for strategic collaboration

- Potential to shape regional policy while preserving local voice
- Green corridors and regional ecological strategies

What parks teams can do

- Engage early in devolution and LGR discussions
- Secure representation on regional green infrastructure boards
- Advocate for clear local vs. regional governance roles
- Provide data to demonstrate local value and delivery effectiveness



However..... Parks funding must be retained!





Questions..

Over to YOU!



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