

## Intergovernmental Relations: Promising Steps Forward, but Cultural Change is Crucial

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Since coming to power in July 2024, the Labour Government has put significant emphasis on fostering (more) meaningful relations between the UK Government and England's regional mayors. Within days of taking the reins of power, the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister met with mayors in Downing Street, signalling [the Government's commitment](#) to a sustained dialogue between Whitehall and subnational leaders.

To facilitate this interaction, two new intergovernmental bodies were established: the **Council of the Nations and Regions** and the **Mayoral Council**. The former, chaired by the Prime Minister, brings together UK Government Ministers, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales, the First and Deputy Ministers of Northern Ireland and England's regional mayors with the objective "[to facilitate partnership working](#)" between the UK Government and subnational leaders. The latter, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and attended by England's regional mayors, ensures "[mayors have a proper seat at the table \[to\] shape the future of English devolution](#)".

The recently published English Devolution White Paper reaffirmed the continuation of these bodies and shed some light on their primary objectives. With a promise to "[put mayors front and centre](#)", the Government sees mayors as key partners in delivering the Government's [national missions](#). They will develop Local Growth Plans, contribute to national conversations, and play an integral role in shaping the future development of English devolution. There are hints of involving mayors more in national policy-making processes, but a firm commitment to this is disappointingly muted. Enhancing the voice and visibility of local and regional insights in the Whitehall machine would do much to add value to national policy development.

The Government's positive rhetoric emphasises collaboration and partnership, but turning words into action remains the real challenge. While the creation of intergovernmental bodies is a positive step, structures alone are insufficient. Success will require a shift from the dominant 'Whitehall and Westminster know best' mindset to a political culture predisposed to 'think devolved', underpinned by a commitment to cooperation, equality and mutual respect.

Hitherto, [the onus has been put on the civil service](#) to stymie its ingrained power-hoarding impulse. Labour, however, must also guard against its entrenched centralist instincts. Devolution allows for diverse approaches to shared problems and offers valuable opportunities for policy innovation. Divergence from national policy or priorities by regional mayors may pose political dilemmas for the Government, but embracing this diversity, even when it creates tensions, is essential to fostering a vibrant and effective governance model. Such an approach would unlock the full potential of devolution to tackle regional challenges innovatively.

The White Paper has initiated a vital conversation about the future governance of England. Strengthening intergovernmental relations and empowering regional mayors marks a promising step forward. Constructive intergovernmental relations are not just a political or constitutional necessity – they are the cornerstone of advancing English devolution and ensuring its long-term success.