

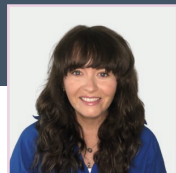
## Roundtable - Devolution White Paper

With Dr. Abi O'Connor, Devolution Researcher -  
New Economics Foundation

William Hall, Head of London Public Policy &  
Strategic Communications - Pinsent Masons

Jessica Craig, Policy Manager - Power to Change

Chaired by Lauren Edwards MP  
Portcullis House & Online via zoom



Dr. Abi O'Connor



William Hall



Jessica Craig

## Introduction

The government's recent Devolution White Paper marks a significant shift in how strategic authorities can influence regeneration and development. With greater control over funding and decision-making, local leaders are now in a stronger position to drive place-based growth. However, as our roundtable discussion highlighted, devolution also brings complex challenges, from ensuring democratic accountability to addressing disparities between regions.

Chaired by Lauren Edwards MP, the session brought together a distinguished panel including Baroness Valentine, Lord Porter of Spalding, Dr Abi O'Connor, Jessica Craig, and William Hall, alongside key industry stakeholders. The discussion explored the opportunities and risks of the current phase of devolution, examining the balance between people and place, the impact on investment and planning, and the role of community engagement in shaping successful outcomes.

This document summarises the key insights from the discussion, offering a snapshot of the pressing issues that will shape the future of devolution in the UK.

## Key Takeaways

- One of the most welcomed aspects of the White Paper is its focus on giving strategic authorities more control over regeneration funding. This shift means that local leaders—who have a deeper understanding of their areas—will be able to allocate resources based on local needs rather than waiting for central government approval. This could help speed up regeneration projects and ensure funding reaches the places that need it most, rather than being dictated by national priorities. However, some panellists raised concerns about whether this control would come with sufficient funding and long-term commitment. Attendees stressed the need for policies that ensure regeneration benefits both places and people—supporting social mobility, addressing regional inequalities, and strengthening local identity. The challenge is ensuring that economic growth does not come at the expense of community cohesion and inclusion.
- A key benefit of devolution is the ability of local leaders—particularly elected mayors—to act as strong advocates for their regions and attract external investment. With more decision-making power at the regional level, mayors and combined authorities will be in a better position to make the case for investment in infrastructure, housing, and business development. Examples were cited where strong leadership has successfully secured private and public sector funding, such as in Manchester and the West Midlands. However, concerns were raised about whether areas without established identities or economic strengths would be able to replicate this success.
- The creation of larger combined authorities offers the opportunity for more coordinated and strategic planning across housing, transport, and infrastructure. By working at a regional level rather than within fragmented local council boundaries, authorities can take a more holistic approach to development. For instance, urban regeneration projects could be planned in a way that benefits surrounding rural areas, rather than being limited to city centres. Panellists noted that successful models, such as Greater Manchester, have shown how regional collaboration can lead to more effective long-term planning. However, newer devolution deals—particularly in areas like Essex and Norfolk—will face challenges in aligning political and economic priorities.
- A major barrier to regeneration is the shortage of skilled workers, particularly in construction and planning. Many local authorities lack the in-house expertise to process planning applications quickly, slowing down development and investment. There was debate over whether devolution will help address these challenges by allowing local leaders to tailor skills and employment policies to their regions or whether it risks further complicating an already slow and bureaucratic planning system.

- While devolution promises greater local control, there was scepticism over whether it will deliver lasting change without adequate funding and long-term strategy. Many warned against creating new structures that add complexity without tackling fundamental challenges such as housing delivery, public service reform, and economic inequalities. Attendees emphasised the need for sustained government commitment, ensuring devolution leads to meaningful, long-term improvements rather than short-term political wins.

## Issues raised

- While greater local control was broadly welcomed, there was widespread concern that devolution without additional funding would simply shift responsibility for underfunded services from central to local government. Many panellists argued that without a clear commitment to long-term financial support, combined authorities could struggle to deliver meaningful regeneration and infrastructure improvements.
- The flexibility in devolution agreements means that different regions will receive different levels of power, which could create disparities across the country. Attendees warned that areas with strong leadership and existing economic advantages—such as Greater Manchester and the West Midlands—are more likely to secure ambitious deals, while less developed regions may receive only limited powers.
- One of the biggest concerns raised was that the White Paper lacks a clear roadmap for fiscal devolution—allowing regions to raise and retain more of their own revenues. While the White Paper promises more control over spending, it does not set out any major reforms to local taxation, business rates, or other revenue-raising powers. Without greater financial independence, many argued that local authorities will remain heavily reliant on central government funding, limiting their ability to drive long-term investment and economic growth.

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