

London's devolution settlement compared with other English city regions

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Scope of the comparison

- London compared with the six other 'established' mayoral authorities
 - Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Liverpool City Region
- Position after the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026
- Themes: powers, money, governance and elections

The 2026 national framework

- English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 (Royal Assent 29 April 2026)
 - Three tiers: foundation, mayoral and established mayoral strategic authorities
- Seven authorities currently hold 'established' status
 - The six city regions above, plus the Greater London Authority
- Established status unlocks multi-year integrated settlements

London's model

- Greater London Authority created by the 1999 Act; first Mayor elected in 2000
 - Mayor plus a 25-member London Assembly that scrutinises and can amend the budget
- Delivery through functional bodies
 - Transport for London, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, London Fire Commissioner
- The 32 boroughs and the City still deliver most local services

The city regions' model

- Built up through bespoke deals and combined authorities
 - Greater Manchester led: 2014 deal, first mayor in 2017
- Mayor works alongside the leaders of the constituent councils
- Powers varied from deal to deal; the 2026 Act standardises them

Transport

- London: TfL runs the Tube, buses, DLR, trams and Overground under the Mayor
 - 2026-27 budget gives TfL about £252m to cover a deficit
- City regions: bus and rail roles, funded through City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements
 - £5.7bn allocated for 2022-23 to 2026-27
- 2026 Act: mayoral power of direction over the Key Route Network and a statutory rail role

Planning and housing

- London: statutory London Plan, power to call in major applications, development corporations
- The 2026 Act gives mayoral authorities similar tools
 - Call-in of strategic planning applications, mayoral development orders
- All must produce a Local Growth Plan and Spatial Development Strategy
- Effect: narrows London's long-standing lead

Policing and fire

- London: Mayor sets police and fire budgets via MOPAC and the Fire Commissioner
 - Met funding 2026-27: about £2.9bn Home Office grant plus just over £1bn council tax
- City regions are more mixed
 - Greater Manchester's mayor also holds police and crime functions; others do not
- Act lists public safety among established-authority competences

Skills and employment

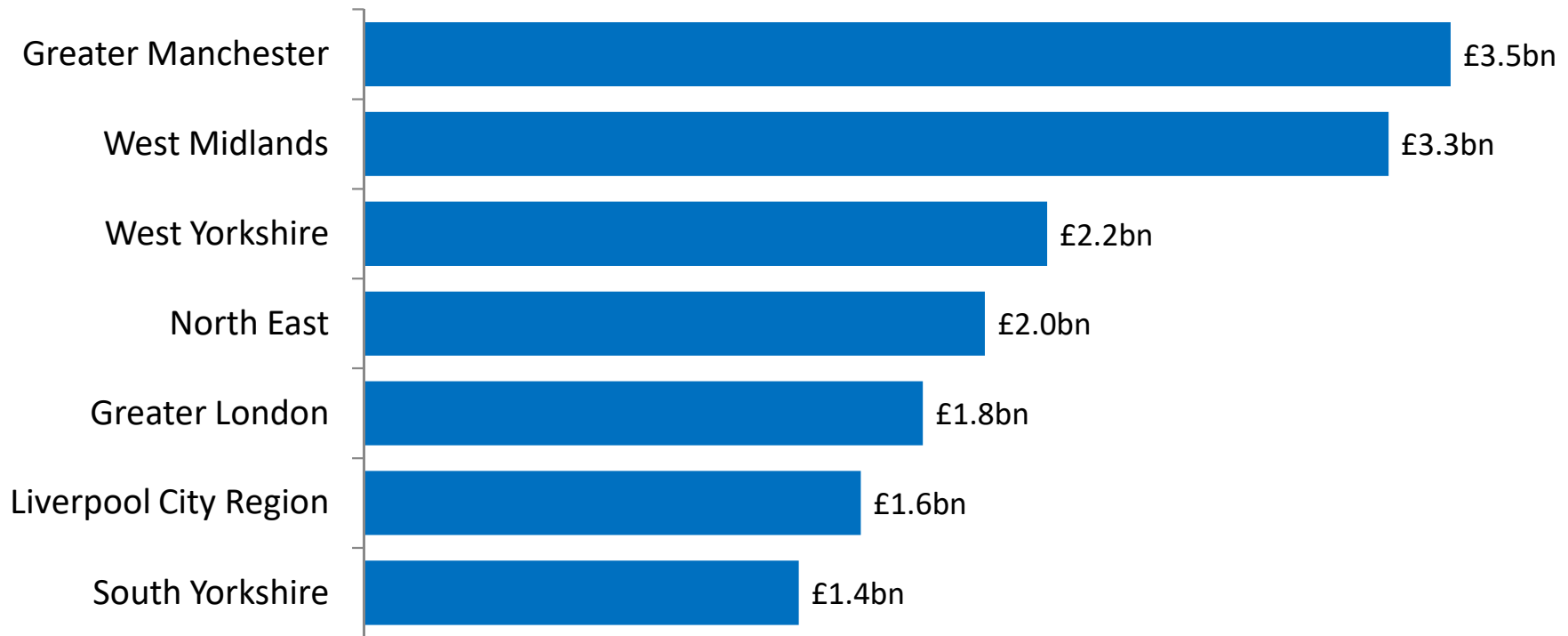
- GLA and the city regions took control of the Adult Education Budget from 2019 onwards
- Integrated settlements pool skills and employment support with other funding
 - Greater Manchester and West Midlands first, from 2025-26
- Aim: one flexible pot and a single outcomes framework instead of many ring-fenced grants

The scale of existing Mayoral Strategic Authorities

Expenditure and income, Mayoral Strategic Authorities, 2024-25, £m										
	London	Greater Manchester	West Yorkshire	West Midlands	Liverpool City Region	South Yorkshire	North East	Tees Valley	West of England	Cambridge Peterborough
Gross expenditure	21925	2577	1967	827	718	819	608	291	272	168
Gross income	21925	2503	1887	922	786	797	725	258	284	169
- Of which										
Government grants	8584	1700	1140	729	621	725	481	202	235	147
Locally raised	13341	779	748	193	165	72	244	28	49	22
Difference	0	-98	-80	+95	+68	-22	+116	-33	+12	+1
Government grant as % of gross income	39	68	60	79	79	91	79	69	83	87

Notes: (1) these figures apply to the MSA 'Group' where relevant to give the widest sense of the authority's expenditure and income; (2) in all cases income from Non-Domestic Rates is deemed 'Government grants' on the grounds that the amount received is determined by central government and is subject to national determination.

Integrated settlements compared



Approximate multi-year totals (NAO, 2026); not adjusted for population. Local reports differ slightly.

Raising its own money

- London's Mayor sets a council tax precept: £510.51 at Band D in 2026-27 (up 4.1%)
 - Raises about £1.66bn; total GLA group spending is around £22.7bn including fares and grants
- Business rates retention differs
 - GLA keeps 67%; Liverpool City Region has 100%
- Other mayors have far smaller local revenue bases and rely mainly on grants

Governance and accountability

- London: one Mayor accountable to a 25-member elected Assembly
- City regions: mayor works with council leaders in a combined authority cabinet
- The 2026 Act gives mayors general powers, such as appointing up to 10 commissioners
 - Established authorities can 'request' more powers; government must respond but need not agree
- New Local Audit Office; poor performance can mean losing established status

Electing the mayor

- Mayor of London: Supplementary Vote from 2000 to 2021; first past the post in 2024
- The 2026 Act restores Supplementary Vote for mayors and police and crime commissioners
 - Used when three or more candidates stand; first past the post for two
- London's election rules still need secondary legislation before the next election

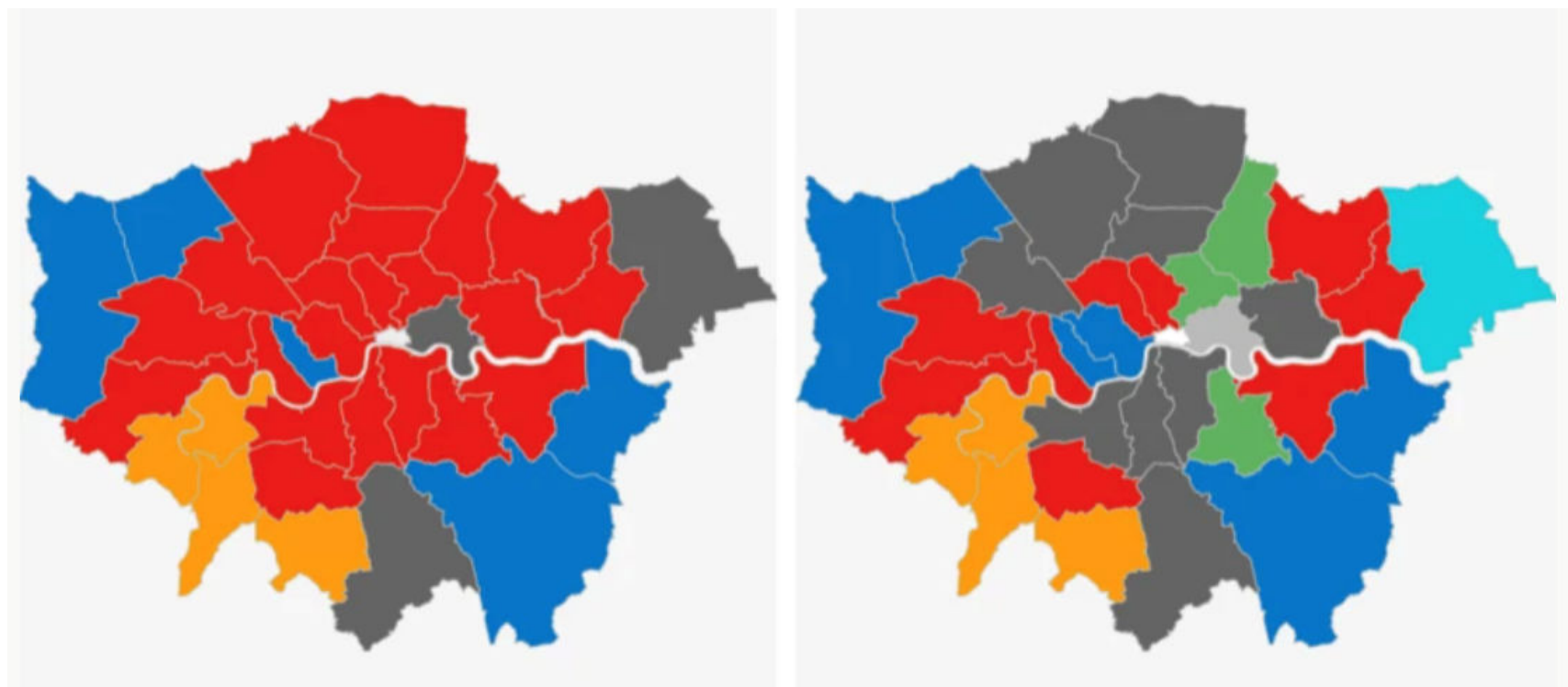
London versus the city regions: key differences

- London: older, broader statutory base
 - Transport, policing, fire, planning and its own precept
- City regions: newer and deal-based
 - Strongest on skills, transport, housing and growth funding
- The shift: integrated settlements and the 2026 Act are narrowing the gap
- Still different: scale, revenue-raising and policing and fire responsibilities

Debates and open questions

- Supporters: local accountability, joined-up funding, growth outside London
- Critics: complexity, limited fiscal devolution, central conditions and audit burden
- Will the 'right to request' deliver real new powers?
- How far is London's model the benchmark?
- Will today's Budget ('fiscal devolution') really change local financial autonomy
- Is this a long-term change to the government of England?

London borough election results: 2022 and 2024



Source:
BBC

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