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Veredus response to the English Devolution White Paper:

The Government's long awaited English Devolution White Paper was published on December 16th. It represents the biggest structural changes to Local Government in 50 years and perhaps unsurprisingly, the battlelines have already been drawn. Already, the Chief Executives and Leaders of the Kent authorities have convened, and we have seen a clear Joint Statement published by 10 of the District and Borough political leaders across Hertfordshire opposing suggestions of a single unitary. Other meetings are happening over the coming week. The creation of Strategic Authorities and the expansion of mayoral powers aim “to empower local leaders and communities to drive growth and raise living standards across the country” according to MHCLG, but at what cost?

With Districts, Boroughs and County Councils disappearing and Unitary Authorities reappearing in their place, one certainty is uncertainty. Since the last round of LGR, we have seen an unprecedented number of section 114 notices issued and the upheaval of these changes is unlikely to make things any easier, at least in the short term. More battlelines will inevitably be drawn and those organisations that will cease to exist will struggle to attract and retain talent. As new shadow organisations emerge, they will draw talent from Councils ceasing to exist, both within their County boundaries and from outside. Many roles will of course be ringfenced.

Even though the White Paper is only two weeks old, we are already seeing markedly different responses in different regions – from the adversarial to the collaborative. With a labour market that already struggles with supply and demand dynamics, 2025 onwards is likely to herald a significant upturn in the deployment of interim managers to ease the transformation burden on Councils, many of which are already struggling.



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Councils that collaborate and seize the initiative will benefit from 'first mover advantage'. It's not like 2009 when we had to look back over 20 years for previous examples of what worked and what didn't – the blueprints already exist with numerous new Unitaries created through to 2023 but models must be carefully adapted to work for the communities that Councils serve rather than to purely work for the Councils themselves.

The starting gun has been fired and regardless of political views, whether the initiative is a reaction to or can do anything to help alleviate the dire fiscal situation in the sector is a moot point. If we were designing a system from scratch in 2025, how might we go about it I wonder?

What is certain is our ability to help. We have been at the forefront of Local Government interim management and executive search for well over 20 years. I've spent 27 years and counting recruiting interims for Local Authorities and in that time fifty new Unitaries have been created. I've hired transformation, change, programme and service leads across every service area meaning that our networks of interims are second to none. We stand ready to continue to support communities by ensuring Local Authorities of all shapes and sizes have immediate access to the leadership talent they need.

Neil Lupin is the Local Government Practice Director
and can be contacted at
neil.lupin@veredus.co.uk, 07967 826026 or
www.linkedin.com/in/neillupin.

