

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN THE

UNITED KINGDOM



1 INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) is a constitutional monarchy in Europe with a population of 60,776,238 and a land area of 241,752 sq km.¹

The bicameral UK parliament, comprising the House of Commons and House of Lords, is based in the capital, London. The House of

Commons has 659 members, elected by a first-past-the-post system, for terms of up to five years. Each member of parliament (MP) is elected by and represents a geographic constituency. The House of Lords is an appointed chamber, which currently includes some hereditary members.

The prime minister is head of government and has the power to appoint the cabinet from

amongst members of either the House of Commons or the House of Lords.

The UK is a union of four countries: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there is single-tier local government, ie single principal local authorities responsible for all local government services in their area. In England there is both single-tier and two-tier local government. In the major conurbations, including London, and the larger towns and cities, there is single-tier local government, though London now additionally has a strategic authority. In the shire areas there is mainly two-tier local government with some local services provided by a county council and others by a district council.

The county council provides large-scale services across the whole of the county and is responsible for the more strategic issues such as transport, minerals and waste planning, highways, education, consumer protection, refuse disposal, libraries and personal social services. The district council has a more local focus, being responsible for providing services in its own area, for environmental health, housing, most planning decisions and refuse collection. Both county and district councils can provide facilities such as museums, art galleries and parks. Parish and community councils also operate at the grassroots level in many areas.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE UK

2.1 Position of local government in the state

The most recent general election was held on 5 May 2005. The Labour Party won a third consecutive term. In its first term, one of its major constitutional policies was the devolution of powers to some regional governments. This was implemented following referendums in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London.

Legislation in 1998 provided for the devolution of powers and established the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Scottish Parliament has limited primary legislative powers. The Northern Ireland Assembly has powers in respect of secondary legislation and limited powers in respect of primary legislation. The National Assembly for

Wales has powers in respect of secondary legislation. Under the Government of Wales Act 2006, the Welsh Assembly can pass Welsh laws – called Assembly Measures – in relation to matters in 20 fields of devolved government.

The Greater London Authority Act 1999 provided for the establishment of the Greater London Assembly (GLA) and a directly elected mayor and assembly for London with significant, though comparatively less, devolved power. Elections for Londoners to elect a mayor and members of the London Assembly were held in May 2000 and 2004. In July 2006, the Government announced additional powers and roles for the GLA. These included new powers for the mayor in relation to housing and adult skills; a strengthened role over planning in the capital; and additional strategic powers over waste, culture, health, climate change and energy and water. The London Assembly was also given enhanced powers to scrutinise the activities of the mayor. Many of these powers are being implemented through the GLA Bill (see Section 11).

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are political entities with their own parliament or assembly.

England does not have an exclusive legislature, and is governed directly by the UK parliament in London. In England there are, however, eight regions outside London that are purely administrative. Government offices in each of these regions and in London bring together key departments implementing policy on a regional basis. In 1998, the Government created voluntary regional chambers ‘to build up the voice of the regions’.² These are currently voluntary groupings of local authority councillors and representatives of the various sectors with a stake in the region’s economic, social and environmental well being. The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003 provides a framework for holding regional referendums in order to establish whether there is regional demand for an elected regional assembly. The first regional referendum under this Act was held in the north-east on 4 November 2004, where the electorate decided firmly against an elected regional assembly. There are no plans for further referendums in the near future.

The first ministers of Scotland and Wales are nominated by their respective parliament or assembly. The first ministers appoint their cabinets. In Northern Ireland, the first and deputy first ministers are respectively nominated by the largest political party of the largest political designation in the Assembly and the largest political party of the second largest political designation. The posts of

departmental ministers are allocated to parties on the basis of the d’Hondt system by reference to the number of seats each party has in the assembly. The mayor of London is directly elected, and the deputy mayor is nominated by the mayor from within the assembly and approved by the assembly.

The Ministers holding the local government portfolios in each country are responsible for legislation in respect of local government and the monitoring and supervision of the implementation of policy. Otherwise local authorities are independently elected and autonomous bodies largely independent of central government. Central government does not have the power to intervene in their day-to-day affairs except where specific provision has been made in an Act (see below).

In England the relevant secretary of state has powers of intervention ‘where there are serious failures in the delivery of certain local services’. Under the Local Government Act 1999 the relevant secretary of state is granted a range of intervention powers, from directing the Audit Commission to carry out a best value inspection to directing an authority ‘to take any action that the secretary of state considers necessary to achieve best value’. In extreme cases the secretary of state may direct a local authority to take action as he or she sees fit, including the transfer of responsibilities to another authority or third party. A range of powers of intervention are also available to Scottish ministers under the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003. In Wales, assembly ministers have identical powers.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

The UK constitution is not consolidated in a single document. Rather, the constitution comprises statute law, common law and conventions. There is no specific protection for local government outside the Local Government Acts. The UK has, however, signed and ratified the Council of Europe’s Charter of Local Self-Government committing it to fundamental principles of local democracy.

3.2 Main legislative texts

- London Government Act 1963
- Local Government Act 1972
- Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972
- Local Government Act 1985
- Local Government and Housing Act 1989
- Local Government Act 1992
- Local Government (Wales) Act 1994
- Local Government (Scotland) Acts 1973, 1975 and 1994
- Scotland Act 1998
- Government of Wales Act 1998
- Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Orders 1985, 1992, 1995 and 2002
- Local Government Act 1999
- Greater London Authority Act 1999
- Local Government Act 2000
- Northern Ireland Act 2000
- Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000
- Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002
- Local Government (Best Value) Act (Northern Ireland) 2002
- Local Government in Scotland Act 2003
- Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Act 2003
- Local Government Act 2003
- Local Governance (Scotland) Act 2004
- European Parliamentary and Local Election (Pilots) Act 2004
- The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 2005
- Government of Wales Act 2006
- Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006
- Greater London Authority Act 2007
- Local government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The government departments with primary policy responsibility for local government are: the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for England; the Finance and Central Services Department in the Scottish Executive; the Department of Local Government and Culture, Welsh Assembly Government; and the Department of the Environment within the Northern Ireland Executive.

Table 1. Size and range of local authorities by population

	Smallest	Largest	Average	% rural
Counties (England)	266,871	1,268,959	956,652	15.1
Districts (England)	24,500	180,567	90,842	n/a
Unitaries (England)	31,489	376,144	170,263	n/a
London boroughs	141,837	333,800	208,558	0.1
Scotland	19,840	619,000	160,906	11.4
Wales	59,317	285,518	128,862	18.9
Northern Ireland	15,400	284,400	63,962	n/a
UK	2,048	1,268,959	125,957	n/a

Table 2. Distribution of local authorities

Country	Number of local authorities			Population	% rural
	Counties	Districts	Unitary*		
England	34	238	115	49,089,000	9.9
Scotland			32	5,149,000	11.4
Northern Ireland			26	1,663,000	n/a
Wales			22	2,921,000	18.9
Total	34	238	195	58,822,000	n/a

*In England this includes the metropolitan and London borough councils and the Corporation of London.

constitutions for councils, with a clear distinction between executive and scrutiny roles. The Act also brought in the option of directly elected mayors for the first time. The overarching aim of these changes was to increase the efficiency, transparency and accountability of decision-making by local authorities.

4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have a unitary, single-tier system of local government. England has a mixed system of either single-tier local government (local authorities known as unitary authorities in shire areas, the London boroughs and metropolitan district councils) or two-tier local government with county councils as the upper tier and district councils as the lower tier. Many district councils have been granted borough or city status. Restructuring of some county councils is currently taking place (see Section 11).

Within the local government system, there are also around 10,000 parishes in England. They vary widely: some represent hamlets of fewer than 100 people, others represent larger towns, with populations of up to 70,000. As a sphere of local government they are elected bodies with limited discretionary powers and rights, laid down by parliament, to represent their communities and to provide some services. Their annual budgets range from under £100 to over £1m. The role they play varies widely but they have few statutory duties. In Scotland and Wales there are around 1,200 community councils which are recognised as being the most local elected sphere of representation. Their statutory purpose is to ascertain, coordinate and express the community’s views to the council and other public authorities in the area.

4.2 Distribution of principal local authorities and population³

In England the populations of county council areas range from 289,000 for Shropshire to 1,369,000 for Kent. The populations of district councils range from 24,900 for Teesdale (the Isles of Scilly with a population of 2,100 is an exceptional case) to 195,000 in Northampton. The populations of unitary councils range from 37,300 in Rutland to 398,300 in Bristol. The populations of London boroughs range from 153,000 for Kingston-upon-Thames to 343,700 for Croydon.

The populations of local authorities in Wales range from 54,900 for Merthyr Tydfil to

319,700 for Cardiff. The population of local authorities in Scotland ranges from 19,600 for Orkney to 578,800 for Glasgow. In Northern Ireland the populations of the local authorities range from 16,000 for Moyle to 270,000 for Belfast.

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

At present all councillors are elected by the first-past-the-post system, except in Northern Ireland where election is by single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies. From 2007 local council elections in Scotland have taken place using the single transferable vote in multi-member wards. Voters must be 18 years of age and on the electoral register. To qualify for inclusion on the register an individual must be resident in the local authority and be a citizen of the UK, the European Union or any Commonwealth country. Subject to certain restrictions, any person eligible to vote, who is 21 years of age or over and is eligible to vote, may stand for election as a councillor. In Scotland any person over the age of 18 may stand for election as a councillor. The term of office for all councillors is four years.

Councillors are elected to represent territorial areas known as wards (in district councils), and divisions (in county councils):

- England – in the county councils each division returns one or two councillors. In the metropolitan districts outside of London three councillors represent each ward. In all other authorities each ward elects one, two or three councillors depending on the population of the ward
- Scotland – each ward returns one councillor but from 2007 each ward will elect three or four councillors
- Wales – each ward elects one to five councillors
- Northern Ireland – each ward elects five to seven councillors.

Since the Local Government Act 2000 there has been a move away from the single framework of political management to new

As a result, all principal local authorities in England are obliged to propose a new constitution from among four forms: directly elected executive mayor and cabinet; directly elected mayor and a council manager; a leader and cabinet; and alternative arrangements which are only available to small shire authorities in two-tier areas. The electorate are consulted on which option they wish to adopt. Any model involving a directly elected mayor must be approved in a binding referendum. All councils had put new arrangements in place by December 2002. The position is similar in Wales, except that there are fewer restrictions on local authorities adopting ‘alternative arrangements’.

A non-statutory approach has been adopted in Scotland where councils were asked, in 2002, to carry out their own reviews of their management of business and working practices under the guiding principles of accountability and accessibility. The structures that emerged from this review moved away from the traditional committee arrangement and fall into three main categories: streamlined committee structures, cabinet-style executives and locally-devolved structures.

The Local Government Act 2000 also established a new ethical framework for council members and officials. An Independent Standards Board was established to investigate alleged breaches of the code of conduct which each authority must have in place. In England and Wales the percentage of councillors who are women is 29%.

5.1 County councils

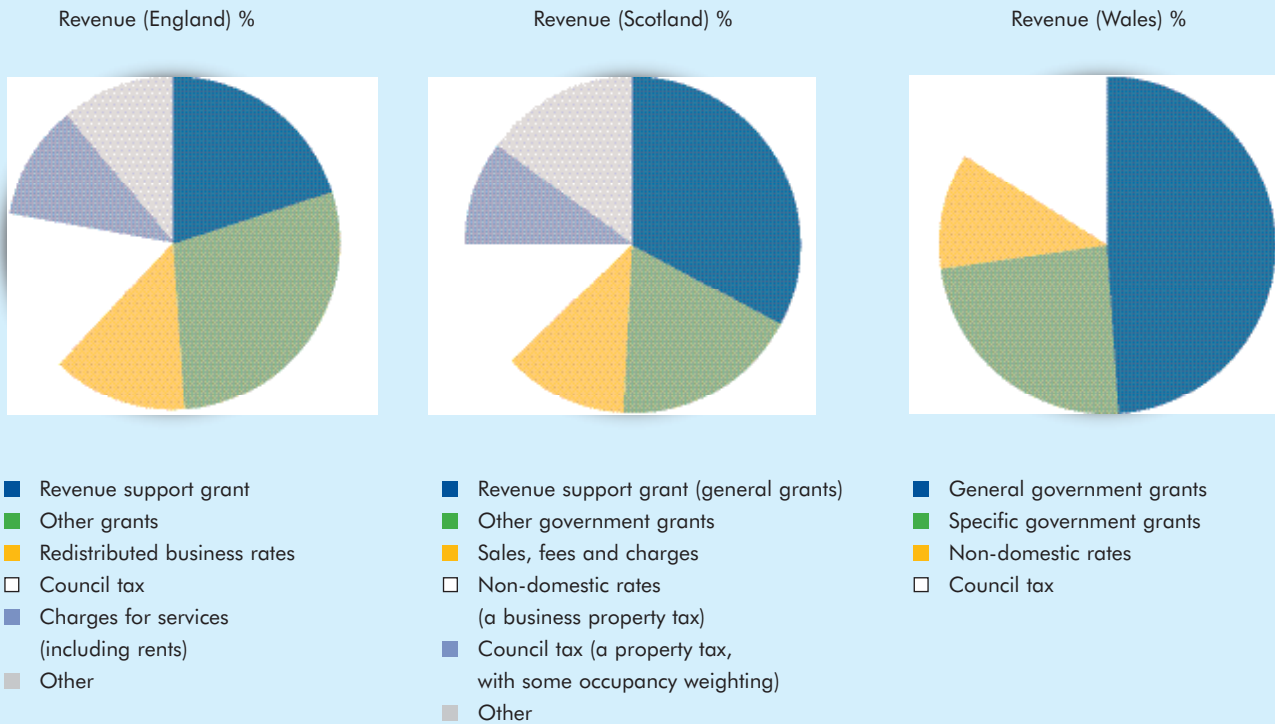
In England, county councils are responsible for strategic-level functions including education and personal social services and emergency planning.

In concert with other principal councils in England, all county councils have established executives to implement the broad budget and policy framework adopted by full council.

5.2 District councils

In England, district councils in two-tiered areas are authorities operating within a county council area; some have been granted

Figure 1. The financial structure of local government in the UK



borough or city status – a status conferred by HM the Queen under the royal prerogative. City status is only awarded to districts with the status of borough.

These councils are responsible for all functions not carried out by the county including housing and environmental services, providing significant levels of local services. (See Annex A.)

5.3 Unitary, metropolitan and London borough councils

These councils operate within a unitary structure and have the combined areas of responsibility of the county and district councils. Again many have been granted borough or city status. In metropolitan areas in England certain conurbation-wide services – fire and civil defence, waste disposal and passenger transport – are provided for through joint authorities.

For London, there is a further strategic body – the Greater London Authority – headed by a directly elected mayor and with an elected assembly, which has strategic responsibility for matters such as transport, culture, planning and development. London boroughs have their own roles and responsibilities as set down in legislation, and they are not subordinate to the Greater London Authority.

5.4 Local government staffing

Local government staff are recruited by the local authority, which also has powers to discipline and dismiss staff. Secondments between central and local government are encouraged and have become more common

in recent years.

The head of the paid service is normally the chief executive. Depending on the type of local authority (county, district or unitary) the statutory chief officers are the director of social services, the monitoring officer, and the chief education officer. Additionally, each local authority must have a named officer responsible for the proper administration of its financial affairs.

Each authority is free to determine its own staffing structure. The general model followed in all types of authorities has at its apex the chief executive, then the first-tier chief officers (or directors) who, according to the size and type of the authority, number between two and twelve. There will then be a tier of senior management, administrative, technical, clerical and specialised staff.

5.5 Consultation and participation

Councils throughout the UK are experimenting with ways to enhance citizens’ participation in the democratic decision-making process. In preparing their budgets for the 2001/2002 financial year 90% of councils in England and Wales consulted their citizens, according to a Local Government Association survey, using a range of techniques including travelling road-shows, referendums or citizens’ panel questionnaires and business consultation.

The best value legislation (Local Government Act 1999) imposes in England and Wales a duty to consult citizens in order to obtain continuous improvement in functions and services to secure ‘economy, efficiency and effectiveness’. Local authorities are required to

give public notice of all planning applications and residents are invited to comment on planning proposals.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 requires that under best value local authorities will be able to demonstrate open consultation arrangements and a responsive ongoing dialogue with their communities.

5.6 Independent scrutiny

Financial supervision, including examination of local authority procurement practices with regards to obtaining ‘value for money’, is coordinated by the relevant authority in each country (in England, the Audit Commission; in Scotland, the Accounts Commission for Scotland; in Wales, the Wales Audit Office; in Northern Ireland, the Local Government Auditor). The auditor is also required to review and report on the arrangements that the authority has developed to publish performance information and comply with preparation of its Best Value performance plan.

Where a person considers that they have suffered from local government maladministration, they may seek an administrative review of the decisions affecting them through the Local Government Ombudsman in England and Northern Ireland; in Wales, the Public Service Ombudsman of Wales; and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman in Scotland.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

The services a council provides vary depending

on the type of council and its location in the UK. Single-tier or unitary authorities are responsible for the provision of all local government functions within their area. In two-tier local authorities, responsibilities are split between the county councils and the district and/or borough councils. Counties are responsible for the provision of compulsory education, personal social services, and consumer protection. Waste disposal is a county task, while waste collection is a district task. Districts and boroughs in areas of two-tier local government hold exclusive competence for the electoral register, health protection, social housing, sanitation, cemeteries and crematoria. They also share a number of competencies. (See Annex A.)

Local authorities in Northern Ireland are responsible for only a restricted number of services: street cleaning; refuse collection and disposal; recreational, social and cultural facilities; promotion of economic development; tourism development; burial grounds and crematoria. They also have a number of regulatory functions. The transfer of additional functions is also under consideration.

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

England: In 2005/2006 local authority gross income was £138bn (US\$272bn) comprising:

1. Revenue support grant	19%
2. Other grants	29%
3. Redistributed business rates	13%

4. Council tax	15%
5. Charges for services (including rents)	13%
6. Other	10%

Scotland: Local authority revenue was £18.3bn (US\$36bn) in 2005/2006 comprising:

1. Revenue support grant (general grants)	31%
2. Other government grants	18%
3. Sales, fees and charges	11%
4. Non-domestic rates (a business property tax)	10%
5. Council tax (a property tax, with some occupancy weighting)	9%
6. Other	16%

Wales: Local authority revenue net of income was £6.13bn (US\$12.1bn) in 2005/2006 comprising:

1. General government grants	49%
2. Specific government grants	24%
3. Non-domestic rates	11%
4. Council tax	16%

Local authorities in England and Wales set council tax rates although central government has powers to cap increases it considers excessive. Capping powers have been exercised against 23 authorities in England for the period 2004-2006. Local authorities in Scotland are not currently subject to specific spending limits. The district councils, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs collect taxes including the precept

taxes set by county councils, parish councils, police authorities and fire authorities.

In Northern Ireland there is no council tax, but a system of rates which is property-based.

7.2 Revenue-sharing

The National Non-domestic Rate (called the Uniform Poundage Rate in Scotland) is a rate for businesses set centrally (in Scotland by Scottish ministers), collected locally and pooled centrally for redistribution according to the population of each authority. However, in Northern Ireland there are two business rates - the Regional Rate set by the Northern Ireland Executive, and the District Rate set by each of the 26 district councils.

The Revenue Support Grant (RSG) is a grant distributed by central government to local authorities each year to provide financial support to carry out their functions. The RSG is unconditional and may be used for any purpose within the competence of the authority. Hypothecated or specific grants are made to enable local authorities to fulfil central government policy objectives.

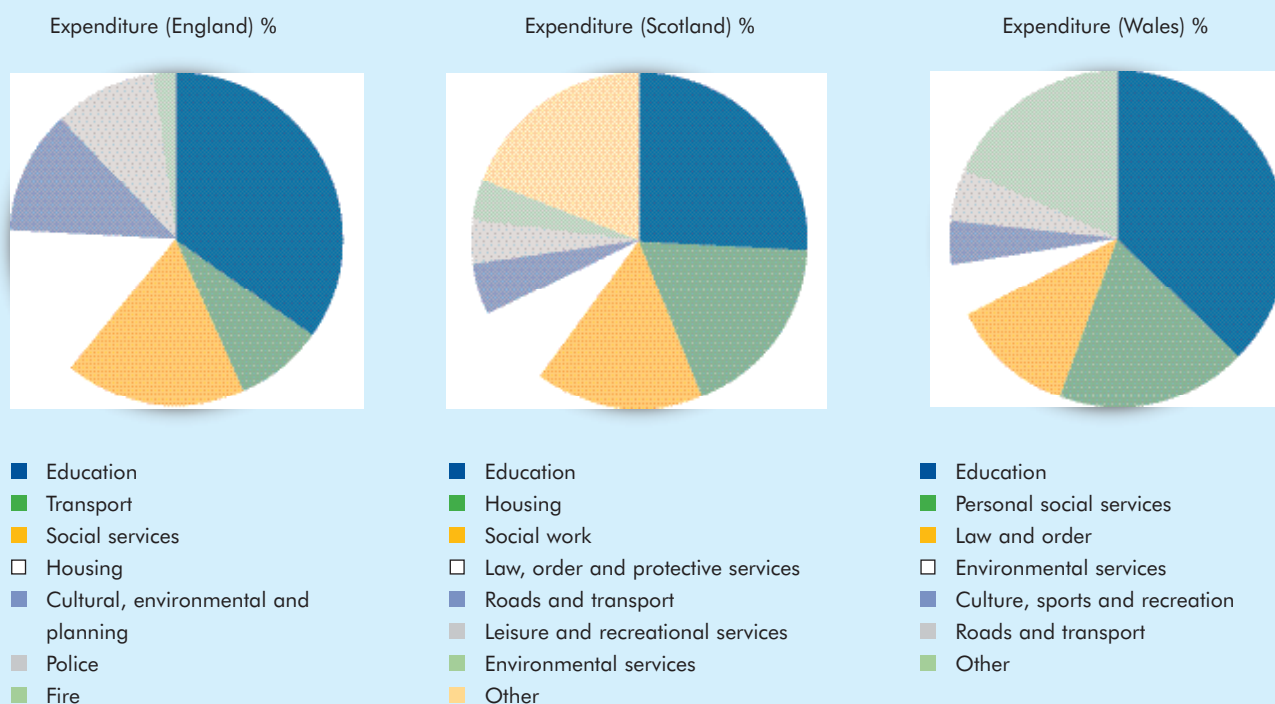
Local authorities may raise capital finance on the open market. Most long-term borrowing is made from the Public Works Loan Board.

7.3 Expenditure

England - in 2005/2006 total expenditure was £142bn (US\$279.3bn) which by service comprised:

1. Education	31%
2. Transport	8%

Figure 2. The financial structure of local government in the United Kingdom



3. Social services	16%
4. Housing	17%
5. Cultural, environmental and planning	11%
6. Police	9%
7. Fire	2%

Scotland – in 2005/2006 local government expenditure (excluding loan charges) totalled £15.8bn (US\$31.1bn). The major expenditure was:

1. Education	28%
2. Housing	17%
3. Social work	18%
4. Law, order and protective services	9%
5. Roads and transport	4%
6. Leisure and recreational services	4%
7. Environmental services	4%
8. Other	16%

Wales – in 2005/2006 local authority expenditure was £6.1bn (US\$12.1bn). The major expenditure was:

1. Education	34%
2. Personal social services	18%
3. Housing	11%
4. Local environmental services	5%
5. Roads and transport	5%
6. Police	9%
7. Fire	2%
8. Other	15%

8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local authorities are free to participate in voluntary associations. Most councils in England and Wales belong to the Local Government Association (LGA); the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) is a constituent part of the LGA, but retains full autonomy in dealing with Welsh affairs.

In Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) represents all 32 Scottish local authorities, and the Association of Scottish Community Councils represents just over half the community councils in Scotland.

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) represents local councils.

London's local authorities have their own body, London Councils, which represents the 32 London boroughs and the Corporation of London.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) represents over 80% of the community, parish and town councils in England and Wales. NALC provides specialist advice and deals with national issues while the 52 affiliated county associations provide more general support. In Wales most town and community councils are members of 'One Voice Wales'.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

In England the Central-Local Partnership was established in 1997 between central government and the Local Government Association. The aim of the partnership is to 'strengthen and sustain local elected government in England'. The partnership agreement establishes the working arrangement and commits both partners to consult one another on issues of common concern. In Wales there is a statutory Partnership Council comprising Welsh Assembly government and local government representatives; in Scotland the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Scottish Executive have signed a Partnership Framework. The Northern Ireland Executive has given recognition to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association.

10 E-GOVERNMENT

Central and local government are committed to making access to all public services available electronically.

The government emphasises that this does not mean that all services should be provided only on the web. New technologies are being used to make access to services available in people's homes, on websites, over the telephone and at council offices and one-stop-shops, in ways that are convenient and helpful to users and provide value for money.

10.1 UK online strategy

Since September 2000 the UK Government has had an online strategy for transforming government activities by the application of e-business methods throughout the public sector.

It challenges public-sector organisations to innovate, with the government providing the common infrastructure needed to achieve these goals. The Office of the e-Envoy is the government department responsible for coordinating this, for assessing progress against objectives and for developing further plans (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/e-government).

The strategy focuses on outcomes and provides coordination between central and local government and other agencies. It acknowledges that local authorities are at the forefront of bringing new forms of service delivery and access to their local communities, and emphasises the importance of partnership with local government.

The e-strategy focuses on:

- Transforming services – making services more accessible, more convenient, more responsive and more cost-effective. Also, making it easier to join up local services

within and between councils, and with other public, voluntary and private agencies

- Renewing local democracy – making councils more open, more accountable, more inclusive and better able to lead their communities by enhancing the opportunities for citizens to debate with each other, to engage with their local services and councils, and enabling authorities to promote social inclusion
- Promoting local economic vitality – a modern communications infrastructure, a skilled workforce and the active promotion of e-business can help local councils and regions promote employment and the employability of their citizens
- Processes – improving the way the 'back office' works, making it easier, faster and cheaper to process, share and present information.

The Scottish Executive published its revised digital inclusion strategy in December 2006. The strategy aims to tackle the issues around the digital divide through a partnership approach and promotes cohesive working across public, private and third sectors so that all citizens can take advantage of what technology can offer. The deliverables in the strategy are linked to the key themes identified as needing to be addressed and include providing a guide to assistive technology products and services and a national database of ICT learning.

10.2 Local e-government

England has developed and implemented a national strategy for local e-government. The local e-government programme – a partnership between councils and DCLG – has seen major changes to the quality and accessibility of services.

Launched in November 2002, local e-government has transformed the e-enablement of council services in England, from 26% in March 2002 to over 97% by December 2005. A partnership working between local and central government has been founded on an innovative bottom-up approach to delivery, helping to build the capacity of councils to help themselves based on a 'build once, share many times' philosophy. Overall, £1.1bn in efficiency gains are forecast by 2007/2008 directly as a result of local e-government investment.

Citizens can go online to submit planning applications, renew library books, calculate benefit entitlements, check council tax balances, report anti-social behaviour, or apply for a school place.

However, it is recognised that the public in

England are not yet experiencing the improved services that e-government can bring and so the government is seeking to raise the awareness of council web services.

Further strands to this embedding of e-government entail:

- **Directgov** is the one-stop web access to all UK public services. Local Directgov is crucial to this one-stop vision as it will link all local authority services to Directgov.

- **Government Connect** takes this another step further. A long-standing challenge in the UK has been to deliver a 'single sign-on' for citizens. Government Connect offers that prospect. It will be secure, easy to use and will provide access to public services of all kinds at every level. Based on citizens' confidential information, the system will be able to tailor the services on offer around the individual needs and lifestyle of the customer.

Government Connect will also enable secure transmission of data between local and central government agencies. This is absolutely vital if the UK is to share data and deliver the joined-up services people need and increasingly expect.

- **Customer First** is a partnership between the Scottish executive and all 32 of Scotland's councils to: deliver more convenient and responsive public services; encourage the take-up of online (self-service) access to services; and to ensure that at least 75% of core service requests can be dealt with at the first point of contact.

In Autumn 2007, Customer First launched a common infrastructure across all 32 local authorities to support:

- A single electronic customer record for citizens
- A card management system to support the National Entitlement Card
- A local authority agents' portal for account maintenance and entitlement card maintenance
- A citizens' portal
- A national property gazette
- Secure authentication services to provide citizens with secure online access to their data
- A messaging hub to exchange data on such details as death, change of name etc.

- **e-Care Framework** is being developed for the sharing of more sensitive personal data. The Framework is the name given to the technology standards, architectures, infrastructure and software developed by the

Scottish Executive to enable information sharing between public sector agencies for the care and protection of citizens.

It will enable professionals in different agencies (health, education, social care, housing, police etc) to share sensitive personal data in their individual agency systems only when there is a legal basis and requirement to do so. Information is only disclosed with the explicit consent of the service user, unless a statutory duty of care allows for this to happen without consent.

In 2005 an estimated 37.6 million people had access to the internet, representing 62% of the population.⁴

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 received Royal assent on 30 Oct 2007. The Act is key to delivering reforms in public services, and will result in reduced bureaucracy and clearer lines of accountability in local government. Restructuring of some county councils will produce significant long-term efficiency saving. Local leadership will be strengthened across the country and greater clarity brought to the electoral process. The public will be given a stronger voice in commissioning and influencing local health and social care services via a new, joined up framework.

In Northern Ireland a review in Autumn 2007 considered what local government is expected to deliver in the context of a fully devolved Assembly and Executive; and, in the context of the strategic direction of the Review of Public Administration, the number of councils and functions that the executive believes would be required.

12 SUMMARY

Local government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is unitary. In England, it is a mix of single and two-tiered systems. Financially, local authorities are heavily dependent on spending levels set by and grants made by central government. However, as demonstrated by its contribution to GDP, local government's spending power is substantial.

Recent legislation for England is setting in motion a transformation in local government structures from its traditional committee system to one with much greater distinction between the executive and scrutiny functions.

References

- 1 CIA World Factbook 2007
- 2 'The Structure and Operation of Local and Regional Democracy: United Kingdom', Council of Europe: 2000, p.2. The majority of information contained here is based on this document
- 3 Population statistics are drawn from the 2001 Census Key Statistics for Local Authorities, ONS: 2002
- 4 CIA World Factbook 2007.

Service	Delivering authority		Remarks	
	Central	Local government		
		County		District
GENERAL ADMINISTRATION				
Police	●			Fire and police come under separate authorities.
Fire protection				
Civil protection		●	●	
Criminal justice	●			
Civil justice	●			
Civil status register		●		
Statistical office	●			
Electoral register			●	
EDUCATION				
Pre-school		●		
Primary		●		
Secondary		●		
Vocational and technical		●		
Higher education				
Adult education		●		
SOCIAL WELFARE				
Kindergarten and nursery		●		
Family welfare services		●		
Welfare homes		●		
Social security		●		
PUBLIC HEALTH				
Primary care	●			
Hospitals	●			
Health protection			●	
HOUSING AND TOWN PLANNING				
Housing			●	
Town planning		●	●	
Regional planning		●		
TRANSPORT				
Roads		●		The metropolitan districts may provide airport services
Transport		●	●	
Urban roads			●	
Urban rail				
Ports				
Airports			●	
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SANITATION				
Water and sanitation			●	
Refuse collection and disposal		●	●	
Cemeteries and Crematoria			●	
Slaughterhouses				
Environmental protection		●	●	
Consumer protection		●		
CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORTS				
Theatre and concerts		●	●	Library services lie with the county
Museums and libraries		●	●	
Parks and open spaces		●	●	
Sports and leisure		●	●	
Religious facilities				
UTILITIES				
Gas services				The unitary authorities in England, Wales and Scotland are responsible for all the services provided by local government. In Northern Ireland the range of services is much more restricted.
District heating				
Water supply				
Electricity				
ECONOMIC				
Agriculture, forests and fisheries				● = discretionary service by the local authority
Economic promotion		●	●	
Trade and industry				
Tourism		●	●	