

Understanding your local authority

There are various tiers in UK Government and knowing which tier is responsible for what can be confusing at first. This guide sets out which local government organisations are responsible for what and who within those organisations may be able to support you.

Which local authority?

Highway authorities

In the UK (excluding Northern Ireland - see bottom of page) transport is devolved to local authorities.

There are various tiers of local authority in different parts of Britain. To influence cycle planning, you primarily need to engage with the local authority that has responsibility for highways (highway authorities).

Highway authorities are:

- County councils
- Metropolitan borough councils
- Unitary authorities

[Find your local highway authority.](#)

[Learn more](#) about the responsibilities of different local councils.

Combined authorities

Since 2011, neighbouring local authorities in England have been able to join together to form combined authorities.

The roles, responsibilities and budgets of different combined authorities all vary, depending on the devolution deal they agreed with the Government. However, transport is a central part of most combined authority's plans.

In May 2017, six combined authorities elected metro mayors:

- [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough](#)
- [Greater Manchester](#)
- [Liverpool City Region](#)
- [Tees Valley](#)
- [West of England](#)
- [West Midlands](#)

The roles and responsibilities of each metro mayor vary quite widely. Broadly speaking though, metro mayors are responsible for strategic planning across a combined authority region. Their specific powers will vary but each mayor will have a transport budget and is able to lobby central government for additional funds.

[Learn more](#) about metro mayors.



[See if you are in a Combined Authority area.](#)

[Find out more](#) about Combined Authorities.

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)

LEPs are made up of a board that includes local business leaders and councillors. They were set up in 2011 to “help determine local economic priorities and lead economic growth and job creation within the local area”.

Every year LEPs are given a pot of money via the Local Growth Fund, which can be used for local infrastructure projects. There is no requirement for LEPs to use this funding for cycling infrastructure but equally there is nothing to stop them.

In the past LEPs have been criticised for their opacity, as their boards are not elected. We recommend that the best way to get cycling on the LEP’s agenda is to speak to councillors who sit on the board, or to get local businesses to lobby the business leaders who sit on the board.

All areas of England are covered by a LEP. In some places, borders overlap. LEPs do not exist in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

[Find your LEP.](#)

See [details of the latest round of funding](#) for LEPs.

In 2015 Campaign for Better Transport [logged the proportion of LEP spending](#) that went towards sustainable transport.

Who to contact?

Councillors

In a local authority, policy is created by elected councillors (shortened to Cllr). Councillors are local politicians who represent a ward.

Councillors can raise issues in council chamber debates and propose and vote on motions.

[Find out](#) which ward you are in and who your councillors are. [Contact your councillors](#) using our tool.

Cabinet/Executive

Each local authority has a committee of councillors from the ruling party (or a coalition of parties if there is no overall control) that make strategic decisions for the council as a whole. Members of this committee each have an area of policy that is their responsibility.

As a cycling campaigner the member most relevant to you is the member for transport. Some cabinets give their members different titles. For example, in Oxfordshire, the Cabinet Member for Environment has responsibilities over transport.

Your council’s website will have details of the cabinet, including minutes from their meetings.



Member champions

Some councils have 'Member Champions'. These are councillors with an area of specific interest that they want to promote. Some councils have a 'Cycling Champion' but not all. Some councils have someone like a cycling champion but with a different title. The best way to find out if your council has one is simply to Google terms like '[Local authority name] cycling champion'. If nothing comes up, get in touch with your council's democratic services and ask.

Remember, member champions have taken on the role because they want to promote it, not because they have any particular authority in the area.

Council officers

Council officers are the staff responsible for implementing policy, not deciding it. They are not affiliated to any political party.

In some councils, officers can hold fairly substantial power because they are in place permanently, while councillors can be replaced each election.

Officers recommend policy stances to councillors. A motion being discussed at a council meeting will come with a recommendation from an officer.

Officers may have a good idea of how practically possible any of your proposals are.

Most – but not all – highway authorities will have a cycling officer, or a cycling and walking officer. Some councils have a whole team, others might have one person working part time.

Get in touch with the highways team of your authority to find out what roles exist. Even if there is not a specific cycling officer, there will be someone whose remit covers cycling.

Council leader

The councillor with the most power is the Leader. Having them on your side could be instrumental in a successful campaign. You could contact them but you may find that they pass your message onto the relevant cabinet member. A better option might be to cc them into any correspondence you have with the cabinet member.

Director for Public Health

The Director for Public Health (DPH) is a health professional. They are unelected but are responsible for determining the overall vision and objectives for public health in a local area or in a defined area of public health. The health benefits of cycling are well known, so the DPH could be a useful ally.

Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)

Your Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and local police force are responsible for roads policing in your area. Their interest in infrastructure may be limited but they are worth speaking to about things like road traffic enforcement - for example of 20 mph limits.

[Find your local force and PCC.](#)



Your MP

As transport is devolved to highway authorities, your MP cannot have a direct impact on local transport planning.

Your MP can provide political backing to your campaign and can lobby central government for extra funds for particular infrastructure schemes.

Your MP can also raise issues related to cycling in the House of Commons.

[Find your local MP.](#)

Whitehall departments

In England, most funding for local transport will come via the [Department for Transport](#) (DfT). The [Department for Communities and Local Government](#) (DCLG) is responsible for the Local Growth Fund, which is given to LEAs. Some funding also comes via the [Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs](#) (Defra) or from the [Environment Agency](#).

Keep an eye on these department's websites or follow them on Twitter for updates.

It is worth keeping an eye on consultations and funding pots that may be useful to your local authority. Cycling UK keeps a close eye on central government funding pots and keeps a regularly updated guide to finding the funding.

Scottish MSPs and Welsh AMs

Like in England, Scottish and Welsh local transport is devolved to highway authorities (see above). Your representatives in devolved governments can provide political backing to your campaign and can lobby regional government for extra funds for particular infrastructure schemes. They can also raise issues in the chamber.

[Find your representatives.](#)

Scottish Departments

[Transport Scotland](#) is the key Scottish department to follow. Current policy and funding is set by the [Cycling Action Plan for Scotland](#) (CAPS).

Welsh Departments

The [Welsh Department for Transport](#) is the main department of significance.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, all infrastructure matters are the responsibility of the [Department for Infrastructure](#).

Your MLAs can raise questions and lobby for increased funding for local infrastructure in the assembly.

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