

Introduction

When examining local and regional politics in England, what becomes apparent very quickly is the lack of uniformity. Constitutionally, the position is very clear: parliamentary sovereignty, even with a partially-written constitution, underpins the system of governance across all of the UK. This means a government may be able to legislate to introduce a new tier of government, or to merge units of local government, or to abolish them outright in the same manner as it creates an *unelected* government agency. Beyond this constitutional position, the clarity disappears. In some parts of England, people may live under a single tier of local government e.g. the city of Leicester, which has a unitary council with an elected mayor. At the other extreme, people may live under four tiers of local government - a parish council, a district or borough council, a county council, and a combined authority. People living in the city of Ely, live in the City of Ely (Parish) Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, which has an elected mayor. Added to this - be it the case of Leicester or Ely - there is also a range of regional bodies such as Police and Crime Commissioners, Local Economic Partnerships, and so forth. This merely highlights the ad hoc nature of intra-state government in England.

The aim of this chapter is to unpick what appears to be this rather complicated system of intra-state government. Each of the different components have, in reality, reasonably clear roles and functions to undertake. It is through exploring these that a clearer understanding can be derived. Yet, what will remain obvious, is the apparently ad hoc nature of developing the structures of intra-state governance in England.

Structure, Size and Nature

As was noted in the introduction, the structures of intra-state government in England are far from uniform. Sometimes, it is easier to present the whole system diagrammatically. Through this, some of the apparent complexities can be highlighted. Figure 1 focuses solely on the tiers of local government, and the different potential structures.

[Figure 1 about here]

What can be taken from Figure 1 is a clear hierarchical relationship where there is tiered local government. Each tier has specific responsibilities with regard to service provision.

Parish councils, which comprise the lowest tier of local government in England, provide the fewest services and wield the fewest powers (see Jones, 2020). They tend to be associated with rural communities, although it is possible for urban communities to establish such a council. Approximately 30% of England has parish councils, although they may also be called town or city councils (as in the case of the City of Ely council). Eight parish councils have 'city' status in England. Interestingly, parish councils ceased to exist in London from 1936, while the 1963 Greater London Act stated that no parish councils could be established in the Greater London area. This ban was repealed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act of 2007. It was only with the establishment of the Queen's Park Parish Council in 2014 that parish councils returned to London.

Some parish councils are larger than principal authorities (unitary councils, or district or borough councils). The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield, for example, has a population of over 95 000, while Rutland County Council, which is the smallest unitary authority in terms of population, has just over 39 000 residents.

Across England, the structure of local government varies. In 1986, the six Metropolitan County Councils were abolished - Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire. These left a series of Metropolitan District and Borough Councils which have continued to survive as unitary authorities.

Since that time, the rest of England has undergone a series of reviews which has resulted in the establishment of some unitary authorities, and the retention of tiered structures in other areas. One of the consequences of this repeated restructuring is the creation of larger and larger councils in terms of population size. England has the largest local authorities across Europe, in terms of population size. There are issues over the extent to which these large local authorities can be termed 'local'. The largest unitary authority in England, in terms of

population size, is Cornwall, with a population of over half a million people. It is the second largest, behind Northumbria, in terms of geographical size.

Unitary authorities, district and borough councils, and county councils each have a specific set of responsibilities. These are set down in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

The London boroughs have acted as unitary authorities since the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986. Despite the creation of a new London Mayor and the London Assembly in 2000, local government in London is still seen as having unitary status. There is a debate over the extent to which the Greater London Assembly is a regional body rather than a part of local government (see Simmons, 1999; Travers & Whitehead, 2010). The establishment of a directly-elected London Mayor gives the appearance of the institutions being part of local government. The responsibilities of the London Mayor, which are examined later in this chapter, highlight the extent to which the role goes beyond local government.

In 2012, control over policing was removed from councils (outside of London, where it is under the remit of the London Mayor) and given to a new position: the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). In Manchester, however, this power was also given to the new Mayor of the Combined Authority in 2017, and the post of PCC was abolished. The PCC is directly elected and was an attempt to better co-ordinate policing across different parts of England and Wales. Prior to the establishment of the PCCs, policing was normally co-ordinated at the county level of local government. The problem was that with the establishment of new unitary authorities, the co-ordinating of policing started to straddle council boundaries, and was deemed to have become inefficient. Hence the creation of the office of PCC. The function of the PCC is to deal with the strategic operations of policing and combating crime. Their remit does not include day-to-day operations, which still fall under the remit of the Chief Constable.

Although there is no formal regional government in England, attempts have been made to establish some form of regional structures. Previously, Regional Development Agencies

(RDAs) were established by the Blair Government in 1999. Their focus was on economic development, with the aim of attracting inward investment into their regions. The RDAs were superimposed across England, in line with the European Parliamentary constituencies which were used for the first time in the June 1999 elections.

The RDAs were abolished in 2012, and replaced with Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). As with the RDAs, the focus of the LEPs is on economic development. Currently, there are 38 LEPs across England. The key difference between the RDAs and the LEPs is that local councils have a key role to play in the LEPs (see Jones and Copus, 2020). To further highlight the ad hoc nature of this level of intra-state government, it is possible for a council to be represented on more than one LEP.

Combined Authorities have also been established across parts of England. Currently, there are ten such bodies, eight with a directly-elected mayor at their head (known as metro-mayors), and two without. The requirement from central government that the Combined Authorities must have an elected mayor has caused problems. It has been a contributing factor to some Combined Authority plans stalling - as in the case of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Conversely, in the case of the West of England Combined Authority, residents who live in the city of Bristol have two elected mayors - one for the city, and one for the combined authority.

Although established under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act (2009), Combined Authorities have been given a degree of autonomy in their approach to strategic planning across their region, with particular regard to planning and strategy for regional transport, skills training and economic development. In some respects, they appear little different to the LEPs or their predecessor the RDAs, except the role of local councils is retained. The councils are part of the decision making processes. While the powers and responsibilities of the Combined Authorities appear to differ, depending upon the deal struck with central government, the reality is there is a degree of similarity between each of the deals. This led Wall and Bessa Vilela (2016, 666) to refer to the whole process as "cut and paste devolution" because there was such little difference between the deals.

Mayors, Councillors and officers (including Executive structures)

There are different ways in which the internal structures of a local authority may work. There is a clear and consistent divide between the role of council officers and the elected politicians. The political structures, however, may differ. Although there are a number of different alternatives, the two most prominent are:

1. elected mayors
2. strong council leader with a cabinet

The Local Government Act 2000 required all local authorities in England to review their local executive structures. While most retained the 'leader and cabinet' structure, a few moved to an elected mayor model. At the time of writing, there were 15 mayors elected to local authorities in England, detailed in Table 2. For a detailed examination of council leadership in England, see Copus and Jones (2020).

[Table 2 about here]

Putting the Mayor of London to one side, the powers of the elected mayors are broadly the same, with one major caveat. The mayors elected to non-metropolitan district or borough councils do not have power over some services such as education and waste management. The responsibility for those services lies with the county council.

In effect, the mayor is electorally responsible for the delivery of services within their council. The mayor can appoint a cabinet of up to nine councillors, each holding a portfolio, for which they are held to account by the full council. The strategic plan for the council will be drawn up by the mayor, in conjunction with their deputy and assistant mayors.

One of the issues with an elected mayor is in relation to the centralisation of power at the local level under one person. In some councils, such as Leicester, there have been proposals to reduce the number of councillors because so much of the work of the council is now centralised under the mayor and the cabinet (Leicester Conservatives, 2013). This was resisted fiercely by the full council. The representative role of councillors remains, as will be examined below. Their role in scrutinising the mayor is even more important.

The alternative to the elected mayor system, which is used by most councils, is that of the leader and cabinet. The difference in this system is the lack of direct elections for the leader

of the council. Just as the prime minister is an MP who happens to lead the largest party in Parliament, so too the council leader. The council leader is a councillor who is the leader of the largest party on the council - where there is a majority party. In the case of coalitions, it is more complicated. In effect, the full council will vote for the leader of the council, and voting tends to follow party lines. This gives a lot of potential power to councillors (see Copus and Jones, 2020), especially if there is a hung council with no party having an overall majority. Individual councillors might be able to haggle for concessions in return for their vote. The counter to this line of argument is the role of party. There is a system of 'whipping' of councillors, to compel them to follow the party line, and this could be over the leadership of a council as much as over party policy on any given issue.

The most prominent 'local' leader, in office in England, is the Mayor of London. Established in 2000, the post-holder gets a great deal of national media coverage. The powers wielded by the Mayor of London are far greater than any other elected mayor. Some mayors have spoken of the need to wield the same powers as the Mayor of London to be able to do their job more effectively (see Gash, 2015).

The overarching aims of the Mayor of London are threefold: promoting economic development; promoting social cohesion; and, improving the environment. With a budget of more than £17 billion, a great deal could be achieved. More specifically, the Mayor of London will develop policies covering transport, housing, economic regeneration, planning and development, health, the environment, as well as promoting culture and tourism in London. The strategic planning powers of the Mayor of London are such that it is possible for the post-holder to overrule the decisions of planning committees of individual councils if it is important to the development of London.

There are however, constraints. On the one hand, the Mayor of London will be pressured by central government to not deviate too much from national policies. On the other hand, there are 32 borough councils in London, each with their own specific needs and problems. The Mayor of London may be responsible for, as an example, Transport for London, but each of those councils will have specific demands as to how Transport for London should be operating within their council area.

Across England, the role of councillors is relatively uniform. This will include the generic ideas of representation, law making and scrutiny. The emphasis on the importance of each may depend upon the type of council, as well as the role of the party. One of the arguments against the further development of elected mayors in England has been the suggestion that it undermines the role of the councillor (see Copus and Jones, 2020). This is not wholly accurate. It would be better to suggest that it changes the role. Whereas in a council without an elected mayor, councillors may be more involved in policymaking and law making, much of this maybe centralised under the auspices of an elected mayor. What this leaves, however, is a far greater importance on the role of scrutiny. Councillors, in a local authority with an elected mayor, ought to be performing an even greater role in scrutinising the actions of the mayor. The problem, however, links to representation. What is prioritised in a councillor's representative role? Is it the ward members and the residents of the council, or the party label under which they are elected? English local government has become so party-politicised that support for a party position on almost any issue will trump the wishes of residents. Of the more than 17 000 councillors in England, around 1400 are Independents. Although these Independents are scattered around the country, there are some concentrations. For example, as of 2019, Independent councillors controlled the councils of Ashfield, East Devon, Epsom and Ewell, Mansfield, Middlesbrough, North Kesteven, and Uttlesford; were the largest coalition partner in Allerdale, Elmbridge, Forest of Dean, Hart, Hartlepool, Herefordshire, Malvern Hills, North Somerset, Redcar and Cleveland, and Torridge; and the junior coalition partner in Bolsover, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, Broxtowe, Cornwall, Eden, Maidstone, Malvern Hills, Mid-Devon, Rother, Scarborough, Southend-on-Sea, Stoke-on-Trent, Swale, Tendring, and Torbay. There were also councils, such as Guildford, where the Independents were the largest grouping but were not a single cohesive body and did not wield control.

One of the key roles performed by councillors, regardless as to what type of council upon which they sit, is that of committees. There are a range of different committees upon which councillors may sit. Some of them are statutory, such as social care, but most are permissive. One of the most important is the Planning Committee. All planning applications must be approved by this committee. There are very clear rules which must be followed when making a planning application. Failure to follow them will see an application refused although the government has signalled potential changes in planning law for England.

Where you might expect to see a statutory committee is in respect to scrutiny. They were introduced in 2000 in response to concerns over inadequate levels of scrutiny across councils. Surprisingly, in respect to the most recent guidance from central government, "[n]ot every authority is required to appoint a scrutiny committee" (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2019, 5). This statutory guidance applies to all councils and combined authorities. While there may no longer be a specific Scrutiny Committee, there must be adequate and transparent scrutiny functions. On a council, this is performed by the councillors.

The executive structures of the Combined Authorities have a statutory requirement to be scrutinised, just like a council. Sandford (2020, 16) notes there is a "specific requirement for locally-led evaluations of all policies". Like local authorities across England, these structures are not uniform. The original idea behind this form of devolution was for there to be an elected mayor, although central government has reined in this requirement in some circumstances e.g. Cornwall devolution deal, where it is not considered to be a combined authority (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2017). Yet, apart from a mayor, there is no formal accountability to the public. There are codes of conduct, corporate governance codes, financial regulations and complaints procedures - as you would expect in any public organisation.

The membership of combined authority executives is not uniform. A range of different partners could be involved, including the local PCC, the Local Enterprise Partnership, as well as all of the constituent councils. Where they stand out is in trying to work across the boundaries of bureaucratic organisations. Fenwick and Johnson (2020) note how the mayors of the Combined Authorities will require a special boldness in their undertakings.

The Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), on the other hand, do not have the same levels of scrutiny (see Jones and Copus 2020). They are much more secretive, involving the development of partnerships between local authorities, other public bodies, private organisations and voluntary organisations, with the aim of developing economic growth in their respective regions. They are very much private sector or business-led, with economic development priorities to the fore, and business people dominating the respective executives. Their formal powers are minimal, as are their resources (see Laffin, 2016). The issue of accountability is an interesting one. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local

Government (2018, 19) notes LEPs are accountable to the communities they serve. Noting the unelected nature of the LEPs and how they straddle multiple councils, this appears to be a little challenging. It is the participating local authorities which bear the brunt of the accountability. Even this is based on the assumption members of the public are aware of the existence of the LEPs, lest say their roles and functions (Jones and Copus, 2020).

One aspect of local government which is often overlooked is the role of local government officers. These are the people who staff the council, and who ensure the council's operations run as smoothly as possibly. In some respects, the officers perform a 'civil service' role, although they are not civil servants. Rather, they are employees of the local council. As a result, and this is where they may differ significantly from civil servants, they will tend to have a level of expertise in the area in which they are employed and will be able to develop that during their career. John Sinnott, the Chief Executive of Leicestershire County Council, for example, has been in post since 1994. Prior to this, he worked at Liverpool City Council and Merseyside County Council. With a degree in politics, he is clearly inculcated in local government.

Autonomy

The issue of autonomy is a little problematic when examining intra-state government in England. The various tiers of local government are quite restricted in the ways in which they can act. They may definitely not exceed their powers. To do so would be to act *ultra vires*, or beyond the law. Even within tiered local government, the respective tiers may only act in the areas in which they have competence, as was show in Table 1. Thus county councils and district or borough councils have clearly designated responsibilities, and may not intrude on the service provision of the other tier, although there can be agreement on agency or joint working.

In a similar manner, the PCCs have limited autonomy. While they may focus upon the strategic planning of their police force, the PCCs are hampered by the overarching policy on policing from central government.

Combined Authorities have a degree of autonomy that is lacking in other parts of intra-state government. Central government has been willing to devolve more powers to the combined

authorities in the hope of stimulating their success. At the same time, as appears to be the case with the devolving of any powers in England, brakes have been placed on the ability of the leaders of the combined authorities - the metro-mayors - to develop an agenda somewhat different to that of central government. The council leaders of the constituent councils have an input into the decision making processes. Noting that it would be highly unusual for all of these leaders to belong to the same political party as that of the metro-mayor, the potential for party-political bickering is such that a metro-mayor with a radical agenda is unlikely to be able to deliver.

As will be seen later in this chapter, the autonomy of any tier of intra-state government is restricted by finances. Control of financial resources is invariably tightly controlled by central government. Thus if any of the organisations wish to take on extra responsibilities, it will most likely have to be done within existing budgets.

Electoral Systems

Elections across local authorities are all fixed term. City mayors, metro-mayors, PCCs or councillors all sit on fixed four-year terms, with elections being held on the first Thursday in May (although the first elected PCCs served only three-and-a-half years, as the original elections were held in November 2012, and those elected in 2016 will serve a five-year term because of the corona virus outbreak which saw the planned 2020 elections pushed back a year).

As with the whole structure of local government in England, the elections are far from uniform. For councils, they can choose what proportion of councillors come up for re-election. Many councils have opted for a single set of elections for the entire council, every four years. Some councils elect half the council every two years, while others use a system of thirds (with there being a 'fallow' year every fourth year).

In the system of thirds, there is actually a degree of standardisation in the elections, which is sometimes missing from councils which opt for entire council elections. In the system of thirds, every ward will have three councillors. Only one of them will be up for re-election in any given election year. Each councillor will have to stand for re-election once in a four-year cycle.

Where there are whole council elections, there is not always a standardised election. In Leicester City Council, some of the council wards elect two councillors, and some elect three. The number of councillors per ward is linked directly to the population size of the ward. The end result is a degree of standardisation when examining the number of electors per councillor elected in a given ward.

There are three different electoral systems used in local elections in England. In some councils, it is possible for a single voter to use all three! Part of the complexity stems from the district magnitude - the number of people to be elected from a given ward. Where only a single councillor is up for re-election, the First Past the Post electoral system is used. Quite simply, every voter can cast a single ballot for one candidate. The candidate with the most votes is duly elected.

Yet many wards in English councils are multi-member. In these circumstances, the electoral system of Block Vote is used (Lakeman, 1974). Voters may cast as many ballots as there are councillors to be elected. Thus in a two-member ward, voters cast two preferences; in a three-member ward, a voter will cast three preferences. The winners in a two-member ward will be the candidate with the most votes and the candidate with the second-most votes. In a three-member ward, the third placed candidate will also gain election. In effect, this is a multi-member version of First Past the Post. However, the name Block Vote was introduced because there was an expectation that voters would cast their ballots for candidates from the same party. This is clearly not always the case, as can be seen in Table 2.

[Table 2 about here]

Elections for city mayors, combined authority mayors and PCCs use the system of Supplementary Vote. Every voter can rank their top two preferences on the ballot paper. The first preference votes are counted, and if the leading candidate has an absolute majority of votes then that candidate is elected. If no candidate has an absolute majority, the top two candidates go through to the second preferences. All of the ballot papers not cast for the top two candidates are then re-examined for their second preference. If the second preference is for one of the top two candidates, then that vote is added. If it is not for one of the top two,

the ballot is discarded. Finally, the votes for the top two candidates are then collated, and the candidate with a majority is declared the winner.

Other forms of public engagement

Apart from voting, there are a number of ways in which the public can get involved in local government. One of the most prominent is the ward meeting or the ward forum. These may be held quarterly, bi-annually or even annually, with the councillors from each ward engaging with the public. Discussions may include the allocation of funding to benefit schemes in the ward, as well as informing the public of the different issues that may arise. Included here could be the local police, council housing, roads and transportation and so forth.

Ward councillors will also normally hold 'surgeries' in their ward, where members of the local community can approach them about issues pertaining to them and to the community. This interaction with the local community sets local councillors apart from other elected personnel, in relation to the frequency and prominence of these meetings.

At the parish council level, if there is no parish council, there is a requirement to hold an annual Parish Meeting. The Local Government Act (1894) required rural parishes with a population of over 300 to have a parish council. If the population was between 100 and 300, the establishment of a parish council was optional. For those parishes with populations below 100, permission from the county council was needed to establish a parish council (Finer, 1950, 118). If no parish council was established, there was a requirement to hold Public Meetings. Such Public Meetings have a distinct legal identity. They differ to a meeting of the parish council in that they are much more citizen-led. The Local Government Act (1972) requires every parish to hold such a meeting, and for it to be held between the first of March and the first of June each year.

More formally, at the full council level, meetings are open to the public. Thus any member of the public may attend, for example, a full council meeting. There are no opportunities for members of the public to participate on the day of the meeting, unless they have submitted a question in advance of the meeting, and it has been accepted. There is an opportunity for a spontaneous supplementary question but it must be related to the original question. Added to

this, there are specific criteria which must be met. For example, no individual councillor can be identified in any given question. This is more than a little problematic if a question pertains to the activities of a given councillor.

There are very few occasions where members of the public are not allowed to attend council meetings. These are in relation to confidential third party information and to issues around national security. There is also exempt information, which may involve the identity of a given individual, their business affairs and so forth. Conversely, that information may not remain exempt if it pertains to a proposed development which may involve planning permission.

This openness of councils and their meetings is a statutory requirement. Local Action Groups (LAGs) also have open meetings, where members of the public may attend and ask questions of the activities of the LAG. The same cannot be said of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), whose meetings are not normally open.

Finance and Taxation

It is when examining the finances of, for example, councils that an indication as to the roles undertaken by each tier can be fully appreciated. One of the smallest unitary authorities in England is Rutland County Council, which has an annual budget of around £39 million (Rutland County Council, 2020). This can be compared to the parish council with the largest budget - Salisbury City Council, which was around £3 million (Salisbury City Council, 2019). The scale of the services delivered by each tier influences the size of the budget.

There is an obligation for councils to run a balanced budget from one year to the next. Failure to do so may see the issuing of a Section 114 notice, which effectively states the council has run out of money. An example of this was Northamptonshire County Council, which was effectively declared bankrupt. The consequence was the abolition of the county council and the lower tier of district and borough councils in the county and their replacement by two unitary authorities. In mid-2020, a number of councils claimed to be close to issuing section 114 notices because of the huge extra expenditure in response to the Covid pandemic (BBC, 2020).

The system of local taxation has two parts in England. The first is a tax placed on each household - Council Tax. This is levied in relation to the value of each property. There may be reductions, for example, for students (who are exempt) or for people living alone. The system is detailed in Table 3. One of the problems is the banding system was drawn up in 1991 and has not been updated, neither have property valuations .

[Table 3 about here]

The Band D level of Council Tax is set by each council. The ratios for the other bands are then worked out accordingly. For a long time, there has been pressure on councils not to raise council tax, or to at least keep the rises to a very low level. If a council wished to raise its levels of council tax by more than 3%, they needed to hold a local referendum to gain approval. Thus many councils would raise their Band D council tax rate by 2.99% to avoid such a requirement.

Another source of revenue for councils is the Business Rates, also known as the Non Domestic Rates. This is a tax on the value of business properties within a council area. There are often issues here around the extent to which an individual council ought to be able to keep the revenues generated under Business Rates. Since 2013/14, councils have been allowed to keep 50% of their Business Rates revenue. This, however, is tempered by the amount of other grants which the council may receive.

There are other sources of income for councils. These include capital receipts, sales, fees and charges and council rents. Ultimately, councils are dependent upon the block grant which is handed out by central government. In fact, councils are dependent upon this block grant.

There have been suggestions of changing this system - for councils to have a little more freedom in being able to raise their own revenues. The problem here is that the Treasury are extremely reluctant to loosen their grip on the purse strings. An example of this can be seen with Birmingham City Council. As hosts of the Commonwealth Games in 2022, Birmingham City Council looked into ways in which revenue could be raised to fund the event. One suggestion, which has been used elsewhere, was to introduce a Tourist Tax. This was to be a £1 surcharge placed on each night a person stayed in a hotel in Birmingham. The proposal was blocked by the Treasury (see Jones, 2019).

One area where there is greater freedom in increasing revenues is with the funding of parish councils. The parish council precept does not have any of the constraints placed upon it which are on council tax. In fact, the principal authorities cannot stop a parish council from increasing its' precept. While this sometimes makes headline news in that parish council precepts sometimes appear to have increased by extreme amounts, consideration is rarely given as to why it is the case. The average precept at the Band D council tax rate is about £64 per year (Jones, 2020, 30). A 25% increase for such a precept is £16, or £1.60 per month for each of the ten months of the year where council tax and the precept is paid.

The funding of the LEPs and the Combined Authorities is wholly in the hands of central government. In the case of the LEPs, they were also able to access funds from the European Union while the UK was a member. From the UK central government, there was a start up fund of around £5 million, with access to other 'Growth Fund' monies, which totalled around £1 billion (Ward, 2019).

For Combined Authorities, there is some leeway to raise some of their own revenue. The problem here is the individual councils have a degree of reluctance to part with any of 'their' monies. This leaves the Combined Authorities to lobby individual central government departments to finance many of their schemes.

Conclusions

In summary, the system of local and regional government in England is far from uniform. Some parts have multiple tiers of government, others have a solitary tier of local government. Added to this is a great deal of confusion as to who does what. A consequence of which is a lack of interest in these sub-national tiers of government.

What is uniform is the extent to which central government is able to control these different tiers of government. Constitutionally, it is simple: parliamentary sovereignty underpins everything. Yet the reality is far more insidious. Central government controls the purse strings; it can ring fence spending for councils; it can cut the block grant. Further, local authorities are constrained by having to balance the books year-on-year. There are legal requirements to provide some services such as Adult and Children's Social Services.

Sometimes this may make a mockery of local elections, where councillors and mayors will stand on a platform which could be undercut by the passing of a bill in Parliament. And there is no recourse. The centre can restructure the entire system of sub-national government. One of the consequences of this parliamentary sovereignty is the somewhat ad hoc nature of intra-state government in England.

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Figure 1: Structures of local government in England (April 2019)

Local Councils in England (343)				
Unitary authorities (92) (includes 36 metropolitan borough councils boroughs and the Isles of Scilly)		County councils (26)		London Assembly and London Mayor
		District or Borough councils (192)		London Boroughs (32) and City of London Corporation
Parish Councils (c. 10 000)				

Table 1: Responsibilities of the different tiers of local government.

Service	Tiered		Unitary Authority
	County	District/Borough	
Education	X		X
Highways	X		X
Transport	X		X
Social services	X		X
Housing		X	X
Fire & Rescue		X	X
Libraries	X		X
Strategic planning	X		X
Development control		X	X
Refuse collection		X	X
Refuse disposal	X		X
Recreation facilities		X	X
Licensing		X	X
Consumer protection	X		X
Council tax collection		X	X

Table 2: Eden District Council, Hesket Ward, election result (2019), electing 2 candidates

Candidate	Party	Votes
Grisedale, Lesley Ann	Conservative	336
Martin, Elaine Mary	Conservative	443*
O'Brien, Richard Kevin	Green	269
Ryland, David Benson	Independent	372*

* elected

Table 3: Council Tax bands in England (based on 1991 property valuations)

Council Tax Band	Property Value (£)	Ratio (%)
A	Up to 40 000	67
B	40 001 - 52 000	78
C	52 001 - 68 000	89
D	68 001 - 88 000	100
E	88 001 - 120 000	122
F	120 001 - 160 000	144
G	160 001 - 320 000	167
H	320 001 and above	200