



Growth and Reform Network



In partnership with

Metro — Dynamics



**Future
Governance
Forum**

The Growth and Reform Network is an ambitious new initiative building on the legacy of the Centre for Progressive Policy and its Inclusive Growth Network, in partnership with Metro Dynamics and The Future Governance Forum.

Our membership of strategic and local authorities across the UK is collectively shaping the ideas, policies, and practices needed to foster inclusive growth and address key barriers through public service reform.

Together, we focus on mobilising the full spectrum of strategy and service delivery levers available across all tiers of government. The Network is both a forum for debate and innovation, and a practical resource offering hands-on support to improve outcomes in places.



growthandreform.org

Foreword



Ben Lucas
Chair

The greatest challenge facing Britain today is the need to grow the economy in a way that raises living standards and life chances for everyone, in every part of the country. That means more people in work, with healthier lives and better jobs, in towns and cities that are more prosperous and resilient. This is both a social and an economic mission.

To achieve that mission requires an equal focus on building inclusive growth and on driving public service reform. Opportunity for all, in an economy that is growing for all. And public service reform that combines efficiency with a people-focused, place-based, approach to prevention. This needs to be a narrative and strategy that resonates through every tier of government in the UK.

The Growth and Reform Network has been founded by the Centre for Progressive Policy, Metro Dynamics and The Future Governance Forum to provide a forum for Mayors and Council leaders to drive this agenda, together. It will support, nurture, and share innovative local approaches to growth and reform. And it will help to develop a shared narrative for public service reform that is as clear in its call to action as the choice, standards and contestability framework was in the early 2000s. Only this time, the focus will be on people, place and prevention, with reform being central to driving inclusive growth.

Devolution is a source of powerful new energy in the British system of government. With our new Network's membership of places across Britain, we want to incubate best practice and share new thinking from the bottom up. We will focus on the big issues that need to be tackled today, and on the new approaches to these that Mayors and Councils are developing. These include: welfare reform; economic inactivity and ill health; child poverty; and new models for investment in prevention, regeneration and social housing.

Our Network members are building on the generational opportunity of devolution, addressing many of these themes that will shape inclusive growth over the next decade. From Greater Manchester Combined Authority's commitment to a Prevention Demonstrator that will join up place-based services to help people thrive, reducing the need for acute support, to the North East Combined Authority's Child Poverty Action Plan, galvanising the region's leadership on the issue and providing direct support to children, families and schools. We will support efforts like these, offering independent help and peer support to unpick the challenges of the status quo, and to make the economic and social case for change.

On behalf of the Growth and Reform Network, I would like to thank everyone who has supported us to this launch stage, not least our Network members and their place leaders. We look forward to the journey ahead.

Our Focus

Delivering for – and with – local communities has become an increasingly complex mission: reigniting stalled economic growth, ensuring broad access to the opportunities it creates, and providing the high-quality public services needed to develop the human capital that underpins a thriving economy. The Growth and Reform Network provides practical support for places to meet these challenges - developing the ideas, policy and delivery approaches alongside a membership that spans local and regional government across the four nations of the UK. What our members all share is that they are collectively setting the gold standard in approaching these challenges and opportunities at place level.

Together, we are focused on bridging two critical gaps. First, the disconnect between different tiers of government – building more mature, collaborative partnerships across local, regional, and national levels to better deliver for communities in a complex environment. Second, the gap between the ambition of inclusive growth and the challenge of meaningful public service reform needed to enable it.

Each of the themes below are developed in collaboration with our membership, recognising the interconnected nature of outcomes like productivity, employment, health, and education, and grounded in the practical realities of designing, delivering, and learning from policy in real time.

Inclusive Growth

How can we create economic growth that delivers for all communities – across regions, backgrounds, and circumstances – tackling inequality as a driver of productivity? Our members are at the forefront of this challenge, leading efforts to expand opportunity, reduce poverty, and coordinate place-based investment and infrastructure to drive renewal. Our Network supports exploration of these challenges and co-development of new approaches, demonstrating what works through our evidence base, and advocating for successes that can be shared and scaled.

Impactful Devolution

Our members are advancing how devolution delivers on the ground – empowering communities and aiming to improve both outcomes and democratic participation. We're focused on how regions and local authorities can learn from one another as they progress towards greater powers and more flexible, consolidated funding. We see local government reorganisation not just as structural change, but as a chance to strengthen partnerships and develop bold, effective policies.

Public Service Reform

How can sustainable, high-quality local services be delivered amid rising demand and increasing costs? We support the development of approaches that recognise the interconnected nature of services, emphasising place based, preventative, and people-centred approaches.

Network Membership

Prioritising cross-tier government engagement and learning

The Growth and Reform Network is non-partisan and includes a purposeful mix of local and strategic authorities, with representation from across the four nations, as well as a mix of urban and rural geographies.

Our aim is to support up to 30 member places which are at the forefront of innovative thought and practice in progressing our focus themes of inclusive growth, impactful devolution, and public service reform. As more regions go further and faster towards greater local powers and single settlements, the Network provides a space to learn from places at all stages of the devolution pathway, and to adopt and adapt approaches that have been successful in similar contexts.

Belfast City Council
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Brighton and Hove City Council
Bristol City Council
Camden London Borough Council
Cardiff Council
Ealing Council
East Midlands Combined County Authority
Essex County Council
Glasgow City Council
Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Lambeth Council
Leeds City Council
Liverpool City Council
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
London Councils
Manchester City Council
Monmouthshire County Council
North East Combined Authority
Sheffield City Council
South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
Southampton City Council
Torfaen County Borough Council
West Midlands Combined Authority
West of England Combined Authority
West Yorkshire Combined Authority



Our Programme

The Growth and Reform Network has evolved from its think tank roots to focus on narrowing the gulf between national policy development and practical implementation.

The Network also celebrates place-led innovation, highlighting and amplifying successful local approaches that can inspire and inform wider national reform. Our programme follows three strands - Convene, Support, and Reform - and it will be shaped by places' priorities and common challenges as they engage with the Network's regular drumbeat of events and activity.



Convene

Working across all tiers of government to bring together mayors, local authority leaders, and senior officers with Whitehall officials and ministers to drive the agenda for inclusive growth and public service reform, renewal and innovation. This means creating space for in depth discussion, new ideas and peer-to-peer support - as an independent platform for our members to facilitate discussion and constructive challenge.



Support

We also provide direct capacity support to build new approaches to the collective challenges across our network. This includes policy, implementation and economic expertise alongside our peer-to-peer programme. The Network has a small core team with policy and analysis capability, complemented by the expertise and capabilities of partners Metro Dynamics and The Future Governance Forum.



Reform

As a Network, our aim is to help to encourage, demonstrate and evidence place-based practice, driven by mature partnerships between national, regional and local government. This depends on developing a robust evidence base of what works and sharing these approaches so they can be tailored and adopted across more places in the UK.

The Network's activity throughout the year includes:

Chief Executives and Leaders Forums

Meeting series for local government Chief Executives, Mayors, and Leaders provide a forum to share insights on shared place-based and strategic challenges. The Network shapes the agenda to reflect the current landscape, prioritising peer-to-peer learning and support.

Peer-to-Peer Development Group

Focused on directors and practitioner teams delivering in places, these sessions advance the evidence base curated by the Network, showcasing impact and innovation while aligning with the early Network priorities outlined on pages 7-8.

Evidence Base and Toolkits

Making policy decisions, designing service delivery, and demonstrating impact all require robust data – which is often lacking. Longitudinal studies frequently arrive too late to influence investment and action. To address this evidence gap, the Network will publish outputs combining analytical research and case studies, providing timely insights to support our members' work.

Whitehall Roundtables

We bring local, regional, and national government around the table with wider experts and practitioners to explore specific issues and challenges linked to local delivery. These sessions provide a platform for in-depth discussion and the development of new practices and approaches to piloting innovative policies, including through the Cabinet Office's Test, Learn and Grow programme. Our first Network roundtable was held in Greater Manchester in July 2025, exploring preventative approaches to public service delivery with a focus on health and well-being.

1:1 Member Engagement and Support

Regular one-to-one meetings provide members with support and signposting on key issues, as well as feeding in their priorities to the wider programme.



Growth and Reform Network roundtable, hosted in Manchester in July 2025

Network Priorities

The membership of the Growth and Reform Network is diverse in its economic geography and local challenges - however there is common ground across several key priorities which have emerged through the Network's early engagement and setup. These will form the backbone of our programme into 2026.

Inclusive Growth

Place-Led Growth & Investment

What role can local government play in economic growth, and how can collaboration across tiers unlock greater investment and opportunity? Building on our work to understand local government's role and impact, we will share findings with members in the early Autumn and work to develop these findings into an actionable evidence base for local growth. This is timely for places looking to develop Local Growth Plans further and to foster place-based collaboration, both in sectors prioritised in the Industrial Strategy and in the foundational economy.

The Best Start in Life for Children & Young People

How can we reduce childhood inequality and ensure the best outcomes from early years through to school readiness and workforce entry? In 2020, nearly 4.5 million children in the UK lived in poverty—the highest number on record. This not only highlights a failing approach to equity and inclusive growth but also threatens the future of individuals, communities, and the nation's long-term productivity. Which policies and practical interventions effectively close this gap, and how can they provide a scalable model for regions to adopt?

Impactful Devolution

Participation in Growth and Reform

How can communities actively shape the delivery of devolution and strengthen their connection to local leadership, fostering greater engagement and restoring trust in the democratic process? Conversely, how can places make devolution meaningful for people in their neighbourhoods through co-design approaches that genuinely improve lived experiences and outcomes?

Translating the Devolution Framework

As the devolution agenda deepens and widens, there is a clear evidence gap - to support those taking on new powers and to evidence the impact of devolution. For places on the Priority Programme to those with City Deals designing their next iteration, there is a need to know what works, to be able to confidently realise this through mature delivery capability and partnerships, while also adapting to the unique context of each place.

Designing Prevention into Service Delivery

Examining how localised, preventative, and person-centred services – including hyper-local and ‘whole person’ approaches – can improve individual and community outcomes.

Our focus is on practical and purposeful action to pilot new approaches, and then to examine how successes can be systematized across places. We are closely aligned to the Test, Learn and Grow programme in the Cabinet Office, which some of our Network members are actively delivering; providing input on key local challenges and complexities and supporting peer-to-peer learning across local and strategic authorities piloting new approaches.

Pathways to (Good) Work

Reshaping how people are supported to find and stay in good jobs, in partnership with a range of local services and stakeholders; on October 30th, the Network will convene in Sheffield to discuss how employment outcomes can be best supported and to reflect on the early outcomes of Test, Learn and Grow pilots in the region.

Public Service Reform



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