

# So what will the Conservative majority mean for Local Government?

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## Brexit

The dreaded B-word has been at the centre of our political conversation for so long that soon some school children will not recall a life before it. As Conservatives write in their manifesto "for the last three and a half years, this country has felt trapped, like a lion in a cage" and the prime minister does promise to "get Brexit done", without extending the implementation period beyond December 2020. Therefore, uncertainty remains about the trade deal, and degree of alignment with the single market, with which we will ultimately leave the EU. The contingency plans put in place by local authorities to deal with the consequences of a "hard brexit" may therefore be put in hold, but might become relevant as we approach that new deadline. What does seem certain, with all conservative MPs committed to the prime minister's recently negotiated deal and a majority to push it through the House of Commons, is that the UK will now leave the EU by 31 January 2020.

## Devolution

The United Kingdom is no stranger to devolving power and the new government's stated aim is to devolve power to places across the UK, building on the devolution of powers to city region mayors, Police and Crime Commissioners and others. They will also invite proposals from local areas for similar growth bodies across England. An English Devolution White Paper will be published in 2020 to provide more clarity on those powers.

## Local Communities

The government has planned to improve many towns and cities by creating new funds to improve the local communities. These funds include:

- Towns Fund – To improve the local economy, initially provided to 100 towns. Local people will decide where this money goes.
- Community Ownership Fund – to encourage local people to save civil organisations or community assets under threat, e.g. local football clubs, pubs and post offices.
- £500 million investment towards new youth clubs and services
- Safer Street Fund – to improve preventative measures in towns and cities including investing in new CCTV and community wardens.
- £250 million investment towards local libraries and regional museums – This is part of the largest cultural programme and the Conservatives promise to work further with universities so that they do more for the local area.

## Local Government

As well as the policies listed above, the Conservative government also promise Opportunity Areas programme for places, like coastal towns, to improve standards and support regeneration. Further homes will also be built and local government will be encouraged to use the planning process to discount homes by a third for local people who cannot otherwise afford to buy in their area. Councils could use this to prioritise key workers in their area, like police, nurses and teachers. Local areas should also be helped by the reduction of business rates that is promised in their manifesto. Local people will continue to have the final say on council tax and Voter ID will be needed for elections. Transport will also be improved with billions being invested in roads and buses and trains.

2020 will be an historic year for the United Kingdom as it appears that we will certainly now be leaving the EU. The actual impact that this will have, on local government and the wider population, may only become clear as the shape of a trade deal (if any) emerges during the course of the next year. If you do have any queries on the matters raised in this note, or the policies of the new administration, do get in touch with one of our experts.

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