Public Services Level 3 – Local Authorities

1 of 17 – Welcome

Welcome to this session on local authorities.

By the end of this session you will be able to:

* Understand the hierarchy of central government
* Identify the different forms of local government and list some of the responsibilities of each
* Conduct research into your local council

2 of 17 – Introduction

Local government exists as a hierarchy. During this session you will progress through the hierarchy to find out more about each level of government:

* Central Government
* Local government
* County councils (upper tier)
* District, borough or city councils (lower tier)
* Parish, community and town councils

You will also find out more about the different jobs that each of the areas of the local authority carry out.

3 of 17 – How do local authorities link to government?

**Central government**

Central government is the political authority that governs the UK. The Prime Minister is the head of the government with the support of the Cabinet and ministers. Central government is ultimately responsible for all decisions and policies.

**Local government**

Local authorities deal with national policy on a local level. They consist of several different parts, including county councils and boroughs, all of which contribute to providing the services and facilities required in local areas.

4 of 17 – Government tiers

Many parts of England have two tiers of local government. In some parts of the country just one (unitary) tier of local government provides all local services, for example, London boroughs.

**County councils (upper tier)**

County councils are elected administrative bodies that provide the public services for each individual county. They provide around 80% of the services for each area. There have been many changes made over time to try and simplify what was originally a very complex system.

In recent years, the government have pledged to promote ‘decentralisation’, which aims to strengthen the role of local councils and reduce some of the power held by central government over local areas. There are currently 26 county councils in England.

**District, borough or city councils (lower tier)**

Within each county, there are several districts. District councils, or borough or city councils if they hold that status, are responsible for providing public services on a smaller, more local scale within each county. There are currently 192 district councils.

**Unitary authorities**

Some parts of England operate under a single tier of local government or council structure called unitary authorities. These are either large towns or cities, or some small counties. They could be metropolitan districts, city councils or London boroughs.

This single level of government provides all of the public services for that particular area and can be city councils, borough councils, county councils or district councils. They are responsible for services such as education, social care, housing, and local taxation collection.

5 of 17 – County councils

County councils (upper tier) are responsible for providing services across the whole of a county.

These can include:

**Education**: County councils provide educational provision for children and young people within its area and aim to raise educational standards and opportunities by investing in resources. They provide and allocate educational establishments to those for which education is compulsory and provide advice and support on issues such as special educational needs, careers advice, home education and childcare.

**Transport**: County councils deal with a wide range of services, such as local highways maintenance, rail and bus travel and other forms of community travel. They are also responsible for managing public services such as parking, cycling, and submitting proposals or bids for various strategies, for example, for local transport improvements.

**Environmental Services**: Each county council receives and raises funding to manage environmental issues. These are wide ranging and vary depending on the area, but most councils would manage the countryside and leisure and public rights of way. They would provide recycling and waste schemes, and strive to make their county more sustainable. This department would also be responsible for planning and drawing up risk assessments and contingency plans, for example, in relation to flood risk management.

**Social Care**: This is both a wide-ranging and large part of the services offered by a county council. Services would include general advice and support for families and individuals on issues such as domestic abuse, mental health, illness, or care leavers.

6 of 17 – District councils

These may include borough and city councils and are responsible for services that cover a smaller area than those at county level (lower tier).

These can include:

**Rubbish collection**: District councils provide information on when refuse and recycling collections take place. Most will allow you to input your postcode online to get information on bin collection days and arranging for garden waste to be collected.

**Recycling**: District councils provide information on local strategy and funding. They manage household recycling centres, how and where to recycle, and how to report waste and recycling issues.

**Council Tax collection**: District councils provide support with a variety of issues that arise from council tax payment. This could be assisting with making payments, providing support with claiming housing benefits, or guidance when moving house.

7 of 17 – Parish, community and town councils

In some areas there is a third tier of government that falls below the councils we have looked at. These are called parish, town, or community (Wales and Scotland) councils. They manage much smaller local services than those of district or county councils.

Although powers are rather limited, they are close to their communities and often have the ability to send strong messages to the councils that sit above them.

Services overseen by these councils include:

* Community centres
* Allotments
* Grants to help local organisations
* Issuing penalty fines for offences such as littering or graffiti

8 of 17 – Hierarchy

You have now looked at the areas in the hierarchy that are shown below:

* Central Government
* Local government
* County councils (upper tier)
* District, borough or city councils (lower tier)
* Parish, community and town councils

The hierarchy should show you how policies and decisions stem from central down to local government.

This is a two-way process, with local MPs and councillors representing their areas to feed back up the hierarchy.

9 of 17 – Question 1

Categorise the following services, according to the government level responsible for them, either **County Councils**, **District, borough and city councils** or **Parish, community and town councils**:

Allotments

Community centres

Council tax collection

Education

Environmental services

Grants and issuing fines

Recycling

Rubbish collection

Social care

Transport

The correct answers are:

Education, transport, social care and environmental services are provided by **County Councils**.

Rubbish collection, recycling and council tax collection services are provided by **District, borough and city councils**.

Community centres, allotments and grants and issuing fines services are provided by **Parish, community and town councils**.

10 of 17 – My local council – task

Now that you know more about the structure of local authorities, it is useful to learn more about your own local council and how this works.

Your local councillor works in your area to represent your views, so it is important that you know what they are doing and who they are.

Use the following website to complete some research on your own council:

[Find your local councillors](https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors)

Consider the following questions when looking at your local councillor information:

1. What is the political makeup of your local council (how many seats does each party hold)?
2. Does your council have a mayor? Who is it?
3. Who is your local councillor and how would you contact them?

Download the accompanying **Local council task - Final PDF** and complete Task 1.

11 of 17 – My local council

All local councils are different and offer slightly different services because they respond to the demographic that they are representing.

Understanding how your local council works will help you to see how they might be affected by government policy.

**Task 2** – Using the website below, find your own local council and use the information you find to complete the table on the PDF:

[Find your local councillors](https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors)

12 of 17 – Summary

You should now have developed your understanding of how government is structured in the UK by exploring its hierarchy and completing some research on local forms of government.

To finish the session, complete the following questions.

13 of 17 – Question 2

How many county councils are there currently in England?

1. 201
2. 26
3. 50

The correct answer is B, 26.

14 of 17 – Question 3

What is meant by a unitary authority?

1. A third tier of government that falls below county councils
2. A form of central government
3. A single tier of government providing all services for that area

The correct answer is C, a single tier of government providing all services for that area.

15 of 17 – Question 4

County councils are responsible for services such as?

1. Education and transport
2. Rubbish collection and recycling
3. Community centres and allotments

The correct answer is A, education and transport.

16 of 17 – Question 5

Which is the lowest form of government?

1. County councils
2. District councils
3. Parish councils

The correct answer is C, Parish councils.

17 of 17 – End

You have completed this session on local authorities.

You should now be able to:

* Understand the hierarchy of central government
* Identify the different forms of local government and list some of the responsibilities of each
* Conduct research into your local council

If you have any questions please make a note of them and speak to your tutor.