

UK 'levelling up' plan unveiled by Michael Gove

The government has set out its plan to close the gap between rich and poor areas of the UK over the next eight years.

The strategy was unveiled by Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove on Wednesday (February 2).

The white paper includes 12 so-called "national missions" in a bid to improve transport, broadband and education across Britain.

The government said at the heart of its strategy was a plan to create more regional mayors, such as Andy Burnham in Manchester and Dan Norris in the Bristol region.

The government said it would invite the first nine areas to agree new county deals and seek to agree further deals with the existing mayors, extending devolution across England.

The first nine areas invited to begin negotiations will be Cornwall; Derbyshire and Derby; Devon; Plymouth and Torbay; Durham; Hull and East Yorkshire; Leicestershire; Norfolk; Nottinghamshire and Nottingham; and Suffolk.

The white paper also announced negotiations for a new mayoral combined authority deal for York and North Yorkshire and expanded mayoral combined authority deal for the North East, as well as negotiations for devolution deals with the West Midlands and Greater Manchester to extend their powers.

The document also includes plans to transform derelict urban sites across the UK, with Wolverhampton and Sheffield the first of 20 locations to be selected.

The money that will be used to regenerate these areas was earmarked by the Treasury in 2021 as part of a £1.8bn sum for

brownfield regeneration announced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak.

A £1.5bn Levelling Up Home Building Fund is also being launched separately.

Mr Gove told LBC on Wednesday: “We’re going to increase research and development spending outside London on the South East, that’s the fuel that will power our economic propulsion in the future.

“We’re going to make sure that we have good public transport infrastructure in all our major cities. We’re going to promote digital connectivity. We’re going to end illiteracy and innumeracy.

“We’re going to make sure that the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training is increased. We’re going to close the life expectancy gap between richer and poorer areas.

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But Labour's Lisa Nandy told Sky News there was "no new money" behind the government's announcements.

"What we've got is a series of rehashed announcements, some of which are so old they were actually originally made by Gordon Brown when he was Labour prime minister in 2008," the shadow levelling up secretary told Kay Burley. "This just simply isn't good enough."

Within the plans, the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has also committed to investing at least 55% of its domestic R&D funding outside the Greater South East by 2024-2025.

The document also announced three new 'Innovation Accelerators', which the government said would be "major place-based centres of innovation", centred on Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, and Glasgow-City Region.

These clusters of innovation will see local businesses and researchers in these areas backed by £100m of new government funding, learning from the MIT-Greater Boston and Stanford-Silicon Valley models.

"It is the most comprehensive, ambitious plan of its kind that this country has ever seen and it will ensure that the government continues to rise to the challenge and deliver for the people of the UK," said Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The government's 12 'levelling-up missions'

1. To increase domestic public investment in R&D outside the Greater South East by at least 40% and at least one-third over the Spending Review period.
2. Bring local public transport connectivity across the country closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing.
3. Have nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G coverage for the majority of the population.
4. Increase the number of primary school children achieving the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.
5. Increase pay, employment and productivity in every area of the UK by 2030, with each containing a globally competitive city.
6. Increase the number of people completing high-quality skills training in every area of the UK.
7. Make sure the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest has narrowed, with HLE rising by five years by 2030.
8. Improve wellbeing in every area of the UK.
9. Boost people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community.
10. Make sure renters have a secure path to ownership with the number of first-time buyers increasing in all areas; and the government's ambition is for the number of non-decent rented homes to have fallen by 50%, with the biggest improvements in the lowest performing areas.
11. Reduce murder, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime

in the UK.

12. By 2030, ensure every part of England that wants one will have a devolution deal with powers at or approaching the highest level of devolution and a simplified, long-term funding settlement.

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