

Key Announcements — 5 May 2026

01

Head Start Pathway

A voluntary fast-track route for councils (city, district and unitary councils) ready and willing to move to unitary authorities now. Outline proposals due by 9 August 2026.

02

Backstop Process

For areas that don't come forward voluntarily, the Government will impose a standardised reorganisation from the 2028 local elections. Model to be confirmed.

03

Regional Functions Stay Local

Following consultation, key regional functions — flood protection, biosecurity, public transport, environmental management — will remain with local government, not transfer to central government.

04

Regional Councillors Gone by 2028

Elected regional councillors will not stand at the 2028 elections. Transitional governance (e.g. board of mayors, Crown commissioners, or hybrid) will be put in place for backstop councils and elections for Head Start entities.

05

Direction: Unitary Authorities

Both pathways move toward single unitary councils combining regional and territorial functions. A single unitary per region is preferred; multiple allowed for large/complex regions.