



BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Borough Charter granted in 1166



Chief Executive: Laura Church

Jim McMahon OBE MP,
Minister for Local Government,
Devolution and Regional Growth,
Ministry of Housing, Communities
and Local Government,
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Please ask for:
Email: Tom.Wootton@bedford.gov.uk
Your ref:
Date: 21 October 2026

Sent via email only to: Ministerial.Correspondence@communities.gov.uk

Dear Minister

Devolution in the South Midlands: the case for a six-authority footprint

I am writing following the meeting held on 20th October to discuss the future geography of devolution in our region, to set out Bedford Borough Council's position clearly. Bedford's preference is for a Mayoral Strategic Authority covering six unitary councils: Bedford, Milton Keynes, Luton, Central Bedfordshire, North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire.

As an MP within the Greater Manchester region, you understand better than most what scale means for devolution. Greater Manchester did not become one of Britain's most influential regional economies as a single borough, or even four. It became powerful because ten councils chose to work together. The Government's Devolution White Paper reflects that lesson, setting a population benchmark of 1.5 million for a Mayoral Strategic Authority. A four-council BLMK falls well short, at under one million. A six-authority South Midlands reaches 1.7 million.

BLMK has frequently been presented as a settled consensus. It is not. Bedford has not supported it, Central Bedfordshire has said it is too small to carry real influence, and North and West Northamptonshire want to be inside a South Midlands authority, not left outside one drawn without them.

For Bedford, the case is practical. Universal's investment at Kempston Hardwick is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and its supply chain will reach engineering, construction and hospitality businesses well beyond the BLMK boundary, into Northamptonshire and across the region. East West Rail will put Bedford at the centre of a corridor whose benefits do not stop at a four-council line. Cranfield's research already feeds Silverstone's engineering cluster and Milton Keynes' technology sector. Together, the six areas share a South Midlands Business Board, over 80,000 businesses and £50 billion of annual economic activity. That is the real local economy, and the boundary of any new Strategic Authority should follow it.



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Together, six authorities are considerably stronger than any four of us could be. The Government has said devolution succeeds when local leaders choose to work together rather than compete.

The boundaries drawn now will shape this region for a generation and it is clear to me that a six-authority South Midlands is the best option to take forward.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Wootton
Elected Mayor of Bedford Borough

cc:

Laura Church Chief Executive Bedford Borough Council
Richard Fuller MP North Bedfordshire
Blake Stephenson MP Mid Bedfordshire
Mohammad Yasin MP Bedford and Kempston



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