# London’s push for combined board masks deeper political control and flouts reform



London’s boroughs are again pushing for a “Combined Board” model to formalise collaboration with the Greater London Authority (GLA), claiming this is essential to speed up decision-making and deliver better services for residents. Yet, behind these calls lies a desire to entrench more centralised control and delay meaningful reform, all while maintaining the status quo that keeps London's governance opaque and unaccountable to ordinary taxpayers.

Councillor Claire Holland, chair of the cross-party London Councils group, criticises the current voluntarist nature of cooperation between boroughs and the Mayor’s office as inadequate and argues that London needs a governance structure that’s “hardwired” into the system—soft options like “collaboration” have failed to deliver. Her remarks at the Labour Party conference, while sentimental about “getting money through the door, more quickly,” conveniently ignore the fact that under Labour’s mismanagement, London’s services have become increasingly politicised and inefficient. These calls for formalised intervention are a smokescreen for those seeking to perpetuate bureaucratic control rather than genuinely enhance service delivery.

The group’s focus on next year's integrated settlement, which would devolve certain funding powers to the GLA, is being used as leverage to push forward their agenda. Yet, it’s telling that the recent government legislation – the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill – introduced in July 2025, sidesteps these reform demands entirely. Instead, it consolidates the existing mayoral model, affirming London’s governance by a single figurehead rather than empowering local communities or boroughs with real decision-making authority. This approach continues to favour a top-down model that favours bureaucratic centralisation over local accountability.

Opposition voices, including the GLA Oversight Committee, warn that London’s sprawling structure—comprising 33 local authorities plus the GLA—renders double-layered governance unwieldy. They argue, quite rightly, that creating a “Combined Board” risks further complicating decision-making and excluding key stakeholders. This is a thinly veiled attempt by Labour and its allies to delay real reform and sustain a system whereby politicians at City Hall can hide behind complexity rather than face accountability for London’s failures—be it housing shortages, public transport crises, or soaring crime rates.

Despite these persistent criticisms, London borough leaders have continued to advocate for reform, hoping to modernise governance and supposedly “increase public service efficiency.” But in reality, these calls are more about preserving the political dominance of Labour-controlled councils and the GLA than about serving Londoners’ interests. Their march for institutional change is driven by politics, not practicality, and risks further entrenching a system that lacks transparency and fails to deliver on promises of improved services.

The Mayor’s office insists it maintains a “strong and constructive working relationship” with boroughs, but this glosses over the reality that accountability remains distant. While phrases like “collaborative delivery” sound positive, they mask a system designed for political convenience rather than genuine citizen-led governance. Ongoing discussions about new financial tools—such as tourism levies and tax increment financing—are merely Band-Aids on a system that needs fundamental reform, not superficial tweaks.

As London faces pressing issues like housing affordability, climate action, and crime, the current governance framework hampers effective action. The push for a “Combined Board,” cloaked in claims of efficiency and modernisation, ultimately serves as a distraction from the urgent need for a clearer, more accountable model. London’s residents deserve a system where decisions are transparent, services are efficient, and governance is truly driven by the needs of the people, not political expediency. Time and again, attempts to reinforce bureaucratic control reveal a reluctance to face the reforms necessary to make London truly serve its citizens in the 21st century.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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