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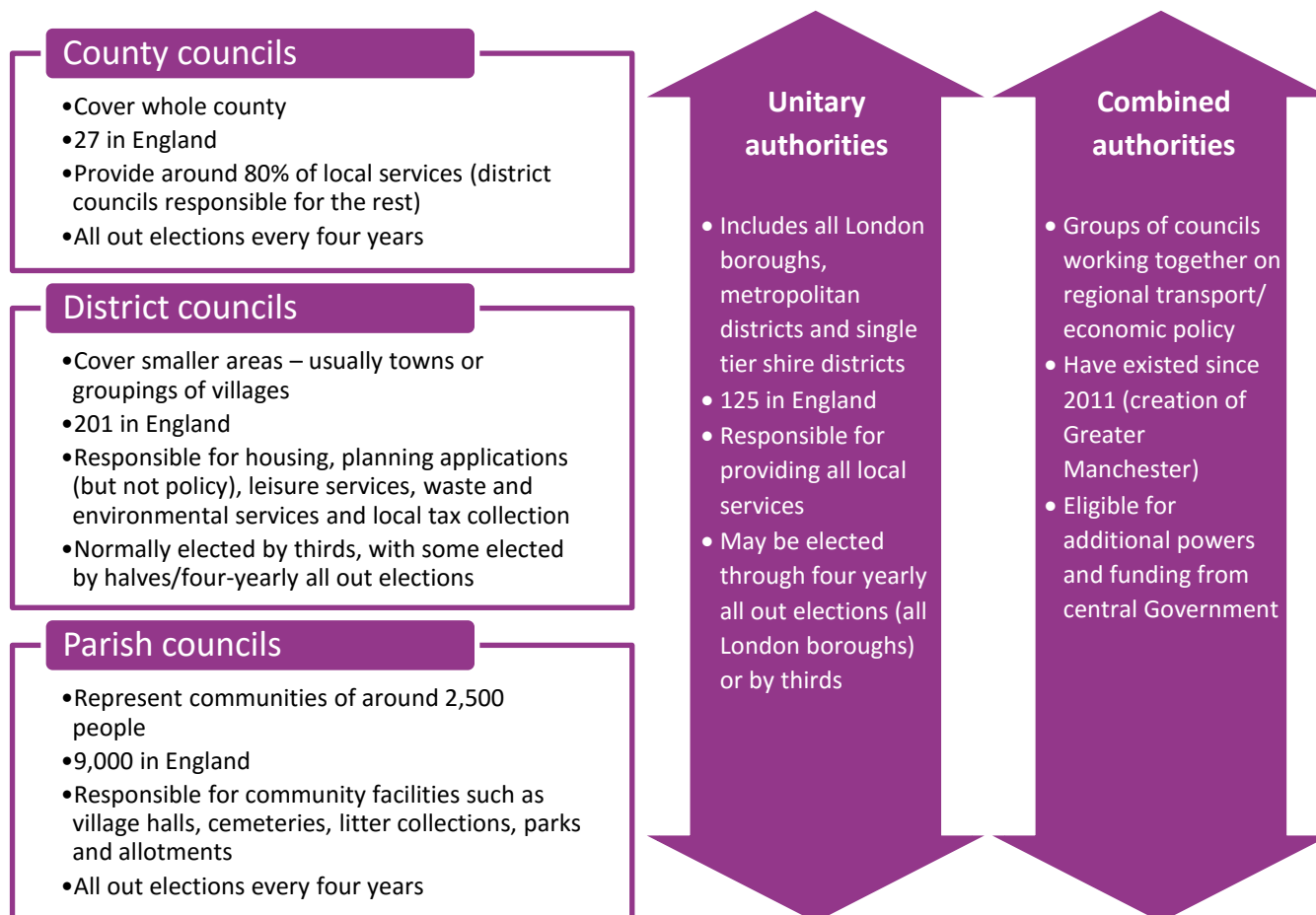
PSNC Briefing 080/17: A guide to local government and community pharmacy

Local government has a growing role in policy-making, spending decisions and oversight of local services and increasingly in the local healthcare economy.

Councils not only control the budgets for public health and social care spending in their local communities, but they also help set wider health policy through their involvement in health and wellbeing boards and the statutory oversight work of health scrutiny committees. Local politicians also work with their local MPs and can provide a gateway to enabling influence in Westminster.

Tiers of local government

Across England there are different types of councils, each with slightly different responsibilities. Not all parts of the country are governed using the same combination of councils – in London, for example, there is a different system to the rest of the country, and cities often have different structures to towns and villages. The diagram below sets out what the different forms of councils are and how they intersect with each other.



County councils have responsibility for the public health and social care functions of local government. A unitary authority will also take on this responsibility, as will (in most instances) a combined authority. These types of councils should therefore be prioritised by community pharmacy in terms of local engagement.

How do councils work?

Councils are comprised of elected representatives (councillors) and officers, who work together to set policy, deliver services and provide local oversight and scrutiny.

Full council

- All elected councillors
- Chaired by the Mayor (ceremonial)
- Can receive deputations
- Hears reports from cabinet members/committees on policy areas
- Votes on certain key decisions, e.g. council tax

Leader

- Overall political responsibility for the council
- May be a directly elected Mayor (NB this is not the same as an unelected/ceremonial Mayor, which all councils must have)
- Normally a member of the largest party on the council – not necessarily the case when there is a directly elected Mayor

Cabinet

- Makes decisions about many areas of policy
- Each member normally has responsibility for one policy area
- Made up of members of the governing party/ies
- Some councils have replaced this with a committee system – a committee which collectively makes decisions on a specific policy area chaired by an elected councillor

Committees

- Made up of backbench councillors
- Some may be chaired by councillors from opposition parties
- **Scrutiny committees** act like parliamentary select committees and scrutinise different policy areas. They can 'call in' decisions by cabinet members and force a committee vote on those decisions
- **Regulatory committees** take on a policy-making/quasi-judicial role in relation to three specific areas: planning (development control), licensing and audit

Working with councils to support community pharmacy

There are a number of ways in which the work of councils can affect community pharmacy, and which should be considered as opportunities to influence the political decision-making.

- **Cabinet member with health oversight:** This councillor will have overall responsibility for spending decisions relating to public health and social care, across the whole area covered by the council. They are the best person to speak to regarding the funding which they oversee and how best to direct this to support the local community.
- **Health and wellbeing board:** Senior councillors sit on the local health and wellbeing board (HWB), alongside other personnel responsible for healthcare provision in the local community. A councillor also normally chairs the board. The HWB is responsible for producing a joint strategic needs assessment and a joint health and wellbeing strategy for their local population, thus setting the policy direction for how healthcare is delivered locally. It is useful to influence this group to help shape local strategy.

- **Health scrutiny committee:** These committees have a statutory function to scrutinise all healthcare provision in a local area, regardless of whether or not it is provided directly by the council. They have the legal power to compel providers or other relevant stakeholders to attend their meetings to answer questions from local councillors. The committee will normally accept deputations (a short presentation from local residents) on items relevant to their agenda, so this can be a way of publicly questioning them about community pharmacy and the role they want it to play locally. It can also be worthwhile to ask them to consider scrutiny of community pharmacy as part of their programme of work, to ensure that they understand the role it plays and that there are opportunities to highlight any issues of concern to the sector to the council.
- **Ward councillors:** Ward councillors will take an interest in businesses and groups within their local community, and may provide support for local campaigns where needed. They could be particularly useful allies where support is needed to lobby senior decision-makers elsewhere in the council, or on ward-specific matters such as planning applications.

Find out more

If councillors or officers ask for more information on community pharmacy, please contact PSNC for help. We can provide facts, figures and briefings on services that you can then tailor to local circumstances. We also have some briefing materials and resources on the website in our [Engaging with politicians section](#).

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information please contact [Zoe Long, Head of Communications and Public Affairs](#).