

We don't need mayors: we need proper local government

Published: January 12, 2026, 11:11 pm

Simon Jenkins is the most annoying of Guardian columnists. A great deal of what he writes is total nonsense. But, every now and again he raises a good point.

He did today. [He argued](#):

England's 12 "metro mayors" should be abolished. Metro mayorships are artificial creations whose regional geography rarely reflects any civic identity or pride. Towns and cities should have properly elected mayors, as is common in other democracies.

I largely agree, excepting major conurbations - which an increasing number of mayoralties are not. Some, in fact, like Cambridge and Peterborough represent utterly unrelated conurbations where most in one place will have never been to the other. So, Manchester, London, Liverpool and maybe Tyneside apart, these mayoralties do, as Simon Jenkins suggests, have almost no identifiable regional role and represent locations to which no one can relate. It is unsurprising that turnout is so low.

But that does not make Jenkins' alternative, which is elected mayors everywhere, better. In fact, I think it a terrible idea precisely because, unless it is based on a single transferable vote, it probably reinforces the two party system, which it might do even if that system was embraced. Worse, however, appropriate checks and balances are not built in. That is why we have councils with reasonable numbers of members precisely so that any governing group is accountable.

We undoubtedly need better local government in England, and maybe elsewhere. That requires more powers, more funding, more control of services, less outsourcing, and more focused powers to borrow. To make this relevant, locality matters. But abandoning accountability will not help. Simon Jenkins has got it wrong. We don't need elected mayors almost anywhere.