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What became of the likely lads?

A decade of regeneration funding since the Brexit referendum

Methodology

This report combines a full map of a decade's regeneration funding with qualitative research in one of its largest recipients. The aim was both to measure where the money went and to understand how it has been received.

We pay particular attention to English local authorities as this analysis looks at funding disbursed by Westminster governments and does not consider devolved funding pots. The English local authority districts receiving the most national regeneration funding were:

Local authority district	Regeneration funding per capita
Hartlepool	£974
Blackpool	£936
Ashfield	£930
Boston	£929
Lancaster	£913
Cumberland	£904
Lincoln	£872
Darlington	£855
Great Yarmouth	£851
Newark and Sherwood	£846

We define regeneration funding narrowly and consistently. To qualify, a fund had to meet three tests:

- In selecting recipients for funding, one criterion or consideration was an area's level of deprivation. We define deprivation in a broad sense, and include funds which consider an area's relative educational attainment, health outcomes, and social care needs as well as formal metrics of socioeconomic deprivation.

- The primary purpose of the funding pot was to address regeneration, and / or equitable growth. This means we exclude schemes where local governments may have used some of their funding for regenerative purposes but national government's express logic for providing funding was different, e.g. to boost post-pandemic recovery, facilitate investments into infrastructure more broadly, or encourage private-sector-led growth.
- Funding was allocated at a relatively local level, to a designated project, neighbourhood, local authority district, or handful of local authority districts together.

Selecting funds

We conducted desk research on UK government funds addressing local economic growth, equality of opportunity, and regeneration since 2010, guided in part by the House of Commons Library's list of national regeneration funds. From a long-list of sixteen programmes, almost all administered by MHCLG / DLUHC, we kept only those whose primary purpose was local regeneration or equitable growth, which used an area's deprivation as one selection criterion, and which were allocated at a local level. This excludes broader growth, investment and Covid-recovery schemes.

The qualifying funds, spanning governments from 2010 to 2026, are: Pride in Place (Phase 2); the Plan for Neighbourhoods (Pride in Place, Phase 1); the UK Shared Prosperity Fund; the Levelling Up Fund; Investment Zones and Freeports; the Community Ownership Fund; the Community Renewal Fund; the Towns Fund (Town Deals); the Future High Streets Fund; and the High Street Innovation Fund. Over 99% of this funding was disbursed after 2016.

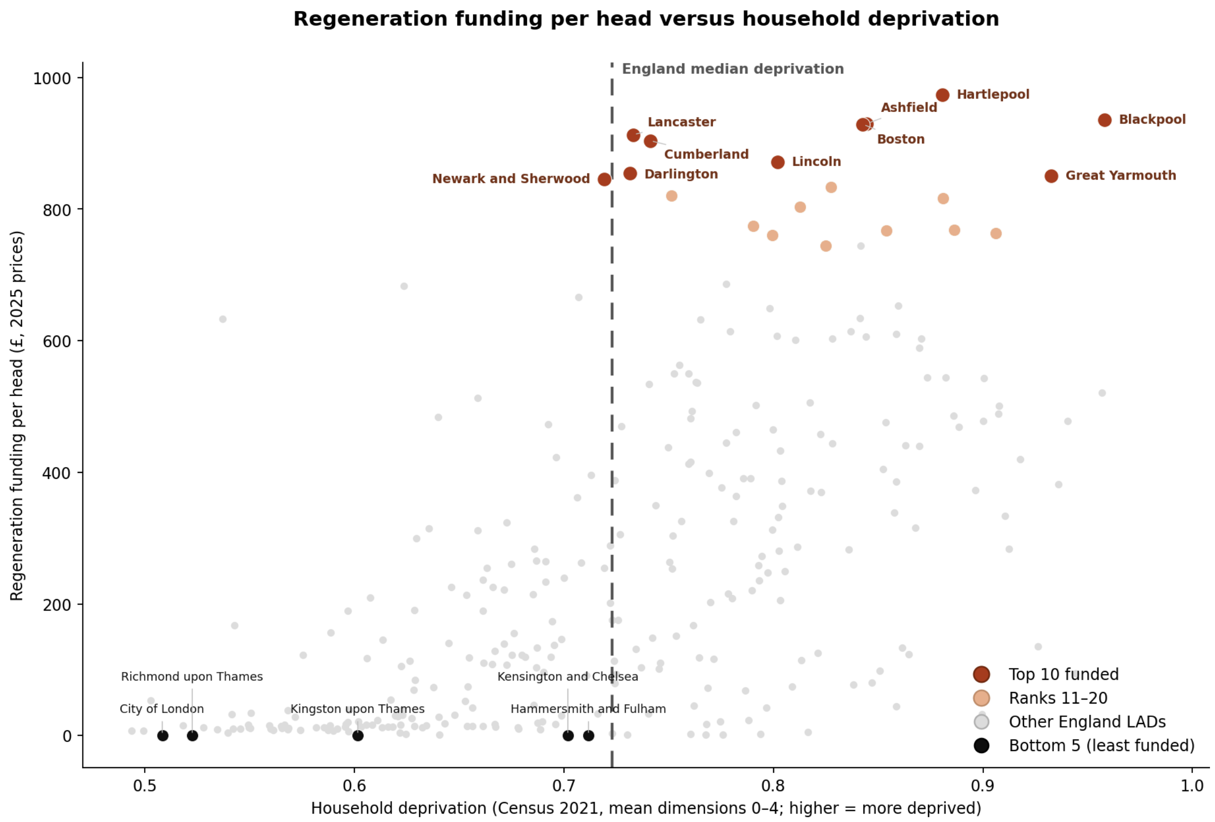
We restrict our scope to funding from Westminster; devolved funding in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland was not included in any totals and averages.

Harmonising geographies and prices

Bids across these funds are reported against a range of geographies: Local Enterprise Partnerships, combined authorities, upper- and lower-tier authorities, and individual projects. We expressed all funding at the level of local authority districts (LADs) on 2024 ONS boundaries. Awards reported at higher geographies were disaggregated into constituent LADs using 2024 mid-year population estimates. Where funds were reported against project or town names, we first parsed names for clear geographic identifiers; where these were insufficient, we geocoded location and venue details via the Google Places API and joined the coordinates to the 2024 LAD boundary shapefile, with desk research resolving the remaining cases. Cross-boundary awards were assigned to the LAD containing the largest principal settlement; awards explicitly shared between authorities were split by population share. All values are in 2025 prices.

Secondary analysis

- **Deprivation.** We built a composite household deprivation score for each local authority using 2021 Census data from the ONS. The ONS measures whether households are deprived across four dimensions: health, housing, employment and education. For each local authority, we calculated the average number of deprivation dimensions affecting households in that area. This gave us a single composite deprivation score, which showed a strong correlation with regeneration funding per head.



- **Support for Reform.** Using quarterly ward-level voting intention from the SHGH MRP, from the 2024 general election to December 2025, we find a strong correlation between funding and current Reform support. On matched comparisons that adjust for composite deprivation scores and foreign-born population share, better-funded authorities show higher Reform support than similar places in every quarter tested. We test the robustness of this result by applying twelve different matching specifications; six algorithms, ranging from simple nearest-neighbour matching to more demanding optimal, full, calipered, and genetic methods, each applied with the funding distinction between better-funded and less-funded authorities set at national mean and median levels of funding. The gap remains positive and significant in each quarter though in a couple of specifications it narrows from five to seven percentage points to two to five.
- **Marginality.** Relating funding under each government to local support for Labour and the Conservatives, and to marginality at national elections, adjusted for time in office, we find no consistent relationship between marginality and funding, and only weak evidence of parties favouring their own seats.

Qualitative research

Focus groups were held in April 2026 in Blackpool with 2024 Labour voters now considering Reform and 2024 Reform voters in Clacton-on-Sea. Local residents of mixed ages and occupations were recruited and the discussion followed a single semi-structured guide covering the state of the town, local services and infrastructure, awareness of funding, and political attitudes. Quotations have been lightly edited for readability and participants anonymised.