

# Highway Authorities Over Sixty Years

For the last 60 years, the responsibility for the region's non-trunk road network has rested with local authorities. The independent county boroughs, in place in 1952, gave way to the large metropolitan councils of the 1970s and, with a number of intermediate steps, to the unitary authorities, in place in 2012.

Consequently, the number of authorities involved with managing the 9,800 miles of local roads in the North East has reduced considerably, from 53 to 12. We chart the course of reorganisation which takes the highway authorities to where they are today.





The CIHT North Eastern Branch covers the counties of Northumberland, Durham, Tyne & Wear and Teesside – a region accommodating nearly 10,000 miles of roads to meet the travelling needs of the community, businesses and industry. The public bodies responsible for improving, maintaining and managing this network are called highway authorities.

Approximately 9,800 miles (98%) of the road network is ‘non-trunk’ and therefore falls under the jurisdiction of the highway authority, whose duties, within their own boundaries, are discharged by the particular local authority. The remaining 200 miles (2%) of motorway and trunk roads are the responsibility of the Highways Agency.

The only constant in local government from 1952 to 2012 has been change and this has affected how the region’s road network is maintained and improved. Of particular importance was the Local Government Act 1972, which instigated perhaps the biggest upheaval in 1974, though further changes have since taken place.

This article takes a look at some milestones in local government history and the impacts felt on the region’s highway authorities.

## 1952 to 1974

Local government during this period was based on a two tier system, with county councils above a patchwork lower tier of urban and district councils, and non-county boroughs. The lower tier authorities were relatively small, with limited powers of self government, often shared with the county councils. The more populated areas of Tyneside, Wearside and Teesside however, were designated as county boroughs, and were independent, self governing authorities.

Generally the rural districts covered larger areas of sparsely populated countryside, whereas the urban districts and non-county boroughs were small in area, more densely developed and with larger populations. This was also the case for the county boroughs.

### *Local highway responsibilities 1952 to 1974*

Type	No.	Examples	Highway responsibilities
County Councils	3	Northumberland, Durham, North Riding of Yorkshire	All roads in rural district areas In non-county boroughs and urban districts – main roads and other classified roads if not subject to agreed delegation
Non-County Boroughs	10	Wallsend, Berwick upon Tweed, Durham, Redcar	Unclassified roads within boundaries Other non-main roads to varying extents by agreement with the county council
Urban Districts	32	Billingham, Tow Law, Felling, Prudhoe, Long Benton, Gosforth	Unclassified roads within boundaries Other non-main roads to varying extents by agreement with the county council
Rural Districts	18	Alnwick, Rothbury, Chester-le Street, Easington	None
County Boroughs	8	Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Sunderland, Tynemouth	All roads within boundaries

Responsibility for the region's road network was split between the different types of authorities as shown in the following table, which also shows the numbers of each type in the region during this period. Local Authorities 1952 to 1974 presents this in full following this article.

Nationally, throughout the 1950s and 1960s there was growing realisation that local government, in its present form, could not cope with the rapidly changing economic landscape. In the North East, some changes were already being made, the most notable being the creation of Teesside Borough Council in 1968. This brought together the previous authorities covering Middlesbrough, Stockton, Redcar, Thornaby, Billingham and Eston, along with parts of other urban and rural district councils south of the River Tees. This brought the whole road network on both sides of the Tees estuary into the jurisdiction of one council.

A more comprehensive national reform was on the cards however, and with the Local Government Act 1972, came the largest upheaval in local government history.

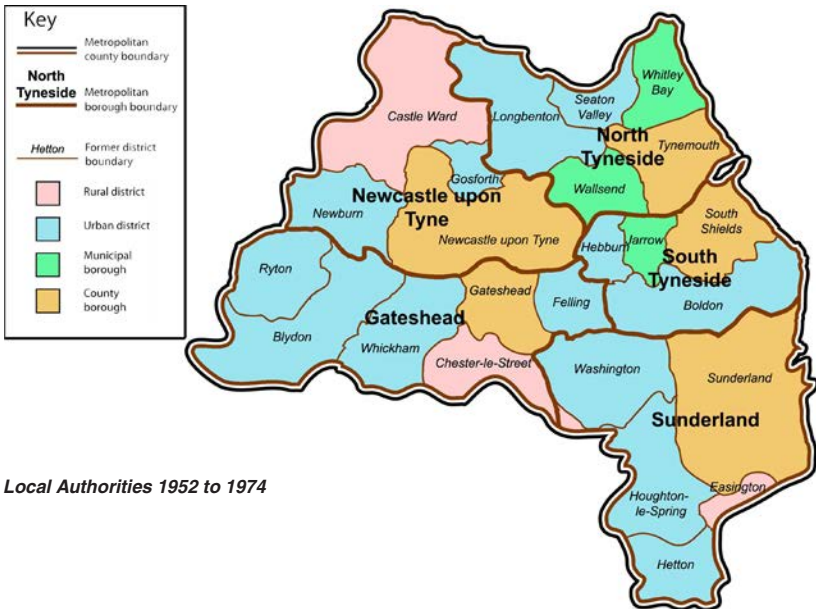
## **The Reorganisation of 1974**

On 1st April 1974 the Local Government Act, 1972 came into force. All existing local government structure in England Wales (outside Greater London) was abolished and replaced with a two tier system. It created 45 new counties – six metropolitan, the remainder non-metropolitan.

The six new metropolitan councils were based on the Greater London 'model' and created to address specific issues of administering large conurbations. Of the remaining non-metropolitan councils, three new counties were created with the aim of uniting areas based on river estuaries (Avon, Cumbria and Humberside), whereas the rest were based on previous historic county boundaries, but with some significant changes and mergers.

Under the second tier of reorganisation, the 45 new counties were further subdivided into smaller administrative areas, forming metropolitan boroughs, and districts within the non-metropolitan counties. The implications for North East local government were the new counties of Northumberland and Durham, created similar to the previous ones, but with some reductions in size and boundary changes to accommodate the Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County Council and the non-metropolitan county of Cleveland.

The new second tier district councils in Northumberland and Durham were quite different to the previous urban and rural district councils, prior to 1974. As they covered larger areas, there were fewer of them. In Tyne and Wear, five new metropolitan boroughs were formed, some of which retained familiar names – Newcastle, Gateshead, Sunderland – but with increased geographic areas, taking in some of the adjacent rural area and smaller settlements. The figure shows the two-tier system of Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County Council.



In the south of the region, Cleveland County Council was based on the previous short lived Teesside Borough Council with the addition of Hartlepool and an extension down the coast to south of the Tees.

The new county councils became responsible for the non-trunk road network but, in practice, entered into agency agreements with the majority of the lower tier authorities for delivery of some highway services. These agreements varied considerably, and were often limited to a district's rural areas with the county remaining in control of the principal and urban roads within its boundary. This approach, unfortunately, tended to perpetuate the previous lack of clarity experienced by the public over which authority was responsible for roads in their locality. However the reverse was true in Tyne and Wear, and Cleveland, where just one authority assumed full control of the road network, from strategic policy through to routine maintenance.

Local Authorities 1974, following this article, shows the highway responsibilities at the time.

## **1986 to 2012**

The uniform two-tier structure lasted only twelve years until 1986, when the metropolitan county of Tyne and Wear was abolished, it might be argued, for political rather than practical reasons. The lower tier authorities of Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland were retained, becoming unitary authorities responsible for all services within their boundaries. In effect, they reverted to the county boroughs of pre-1974 days, once again becoming separate highway authorities, albeit with a larger geographic area. The need for a joined up highways and transport strategy across Tyne and Wear was not overlooked however, and joint working arrangements and collaborative partnerships developed between the authorities.

Cleveland County Council was also eventually abolished in 1996 with Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool and Langbaugh (renamed Redcar and Cleveland) becoming unitary authorities fully responsible for the road network in their areas. A year later, Darlington became a unitary authority, breaking free from Durham County Council and becoming entirely responsible for its road network. Again this was a reversion to its pre 1974 state, albeit with a larger geographical area.

The Northumberland and Durham two-tier system continued until 2009 when the district authorities were abolished, leaving the two county councils as unitary authorities, and highway authorities, of their particular road networks.

As of 2012 the position across the region is one of a number of unitary authorities of varying geographic size and extent of road network for which they are responsible. It has been possible, in this situation, to take advantages of economies of scale to deliver more cost-effective highway services, along with eliminating ambiguity in the supply chain, and to the public, over who is responsible for the road network.

*Thanks to Malcolm Smith of the CIHT North Eastern branch, for preparing this article.*

**If you enjoyed this article, try also:**

*Motorway and Trunk Road Development in the North East*

## Types of Local Authorities

**County councils** were first established in England & Wales by the Local Government Act 1888. They were created to administer certain 'main' services including education, town & country planning, police, fire and highways. However some of these functions were often delegated to the non-county boroughs, urban districts and rural districts within the county. They were all abolished as administrative units in 1974, replaced by metropolitan and non-metropolitan county councils.

**County boroughs** were also established by the Local Government Act of 1888 from the historic municipal boroughs. They were created to administer larger cities (usually with a population > 50,000) and were not subject to the jurisdiction of the county within which they were geographically situated. They were the equivalent of today's unitary authorities with powers of both county council and a non-county borough council. They were abolished in 1974.





**Non-county boroughs** were created by the Local Government Act 1894 from the historic municipal boroughs that had not been designated county boroughs by the 1888 Act. Their powers and functions included housing, refuse collection, cemeteries, markets, libraries and parks. ‘Main’ services were provided by the county council. The non-county boroughs were abolished in 1974, but some of the new district councils were granted borough status, which meant little more than having a ‘figurehead’ mayor preside over council meetings rather than a chairman.

**Urban district councils** were created by the Local Government Act 1894 and were based on and the old urban sanitary authorities and local boards of health. They did not have the history and tradition of the non-county boroughs but their powers and functions were almost the same. They were abolished in 1974.

**Rural district councils** were also created by the Local Government Act 1894 and were the old rural sanitary districts. Their principal powers and functions included housing, water supply, sewerage and refuse collection. ‘Main’ services were provided by the county council. They were abolished in 1974.

**Metropolitan counties** (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne & Wear, West Midlands and West Yorkshire) were created by the Local Government Act 1972 as part of the first tier of a uniform two-tier system across England. They were responsible for strategic planning, traffic and transportation, passenger transport authority, highways, police, fire and refuse disposal in the larger conurbations. Where appropriate they had the powers to enter into an agency agreement for defined services with the second tier district authorities whereby that district acted as the county’s agent e.g. for highway maintenance. All the metropolitan counties, including the Greater London Council, were abolished in 1986.

**Metropolitan districts** were the second tier authority in the metropolitan counties and were responsible for municipal airports, education, libraries, planning, social services, housing and refuse collection, among others. Certain highway responsibilities were delegated to the districts through agency agreements with the metropolitan counties. They became autonomous unitary authorities upon abolition of the metropolitan counties in 1986.

**Non-metropolitan counties** (sometimes referred to as shire counties) were created by the Local Government Act 1972 and along with the metropolitan counties were the first tier of the two tier system introduced in 1974. With varying degrees of changes to boundaries they were formed from the historic counties although several disappeared completely. Three new counties were based on river estuaries (Cleveland, Avon and Humberside) and had more or less the same functions as their metropolitan counterparts, including highways, and the same power to enter into agency agreements with the second tier district authorities.

**Non-metropolitan districts** were the second tier in non-metropolitan counties and were responsible for many of the functions of their metropolitan counterparts, apart from education and social services. Many exercised highway responsibilities to varying degrees, through agency agreements with the county council. In the North East they were abolished in 2009 when Northumberland and Durham county councils became unitary authorities.

**Unitary authorities** are independent self governing authorities which are today's equivalent of the pre-1974 county boroughs. They are responsible for all services within their boundaries, including highways. On the abolition of Tyne and Wear Metropolitan County Council in 1986 and Cleveland County Council in 1996, the constituent districts became unitary authorities. Since then further reorganisations created unitary authorities from previous districts (Darlington) and county councils (Northumberland and Durham).

**Local Authorities 1952 to 1974**

1st Tier	2nd Tier			County Boroughs
County Councils	Non-County Boroughs	Urban Districts	Rural Districts	
Northumberland	Berwick upon Tweed Blyth Morpeth Wallsend Whitley Bay	Alnwick Amble Ashington Bedlingtonshire Gosforth Hexham Long Benton Newbiggin-by-the-Sea Newburn Prudhoe Seaton Valley	Alnwick Belford Bellingham Castle Ward Glendale Haltwhistle Hexham Morpeth Norham and Islandshires Rothbury	Newcastle upon Tyne Tynemouth
Durham	Durham Jarrow Stockton on Tees* Thornaby on Tees*	Billingham* Chester-le-Street Consett Crook and Willington Felling Hebburn Hetton Houghton -le-Spring Ryton Seaham Shildon Spennymoor Stanley Tow Law Washington Whickham	Darlington Durham Easington Lanchester Sedgefield Stockton Weardale	Darlington Gateshead Hartlepool South Shields Sunderland Teesside**
North Riding of Yorkshire	Redcar*	Guisborough (part) Loftus Saltburn and Marske-by -the-Sea Skelton and Brotton Eston*	Stokesley (part)	Middlesbrough* Teesside**

Key: \* to 1968;

\*\* from 1968

**Local Authorities 1974**

1st Tier County Councils	2nd Tier District Councils	Highway Responsibilities
Northumberland CC		Highway Authority for all non-trunk/motorways within administrative boundary
	Berwick upon Tweed	Agency Agreement for maintenance of unclassified roads in Berwick urban area
	Alnwick	None
	Castle Morpeth	Agency Agreement for maintenance of all roads in Morpeth urban area
	Tynedale	Agency Agreement for maintenance of unclassified roads in Hexham, Prudhoe and Stocksfield
	Blyth Valley	Agency Agreement for maintenance of all roads in District Council area (except A189)
	Wansbeck	Agency Agreement for maintenance of all roads in District Council area (except A189)

Durham CC		Highway Authority for all non-trunk/motorways within administrative boundary
	Derwentside	Agency Agreement for maintenance of non-main roads in defined built up areas <sup>(2)</sup>
	Chester -le -Street	Agency Agreement for maintenance of non-main roads in defined built up areas <sup>(2)</sup>
	Darlington <sup>(1)</sup>	Agency Agreement for maintenance of non-main roads in defined built up areas <sup>(2)</sup>
	Durham	Agency Agreement for maintenance of non-main roads in defined built up areas <sup>(2)</sup>
	Wearside	Agency Agreement for maintenance of non-main roads in defined built up areas <sup>(2)</sup>
	Teesdale	None
	Sedgefield	Agency Agreement for maintenance of non-main roads in defined built up areas <sup>(2)</sup>
	Easington	Agency Agreement for maintenance of non-main roads in defined built up areas <sup>(2)</sup>

Tyne & Wear Metropolitan CC <sup>(3)</sup>		Highway Authority for all non-trunk/motorways within administrative boundary
	Newcastle	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(4)</sup>
	Gateshead	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(4)</sup>
	N Tyneside	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(4)</sup>
	S Tyneside	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(4)</sup>
	Sunderland	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(4)</sup>

Cleveland CC <sup>(5)</sup>		Highway Authority for all non-trunk/motorways within administrative boundary
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1st Tier County Councils	2nd Tier District Councils	Highway Responsibilities
	Middlesbrough	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(6)</sup>
	Stockton	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(6)</sup>
	Hartlepool	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(6)</sup>
	Langbaugh on Tees	Agency agreement for all roads <sup>(6)</sup>

Notes	
	(1) to 1997 and thereafter a unitary council
	(2) Agency Agreements terminated in 2004
	(3) abolished in 1986
	(4) after 1986 became a unitary authority
	(5) abolished in 1996
	(6) after 1996 became a unitary authority
	Langbaugh on Tees was renamed Redcar & Cleveland on becoming a unitary authority in 1996



*Highway Authorities in 2012 – Lengths of County Road Networks in Miles by Authority and Road Class*

Authority	Principal Motorway	Principal Rural	Principal Urban	B Class Rural	B Class Urban	C Class Rural	C Class Urban	Unclassified Rural	Unclassified Urban	Total
Northumberland County	0.0	250.5	22.9	380.3	15.7	903.8	43.4	1,194.8	302.9	3,114.3
Durham County	0.0	203.4	21.8	221.1	28.6	395.1	36.5	770.7	555.1	2,232.3
Darlington	0.0	23.5	8.6	12.2	6.3	56.0	11.7	59.2	148.6	326.1
Gateshead	0.0	17.6	19.9	11.5	16.9	21.6	37.8	90.3	332.2	547.8
Hartlepool	0.0	10.9	12.3	0.7	4.8	7.8	6.7	26.8	172.9	242.9
Middlesbrough	0.0	2.1	17.9	3.6	6.0	2.6	13.8	6.0	255.8	307.8
Newcastle upon Tyne	1.5	0.8	40.4	6.8	22.8	8.9	44.9	34.5	428.7	589.3
North Tyneside	0.0	9.6	38.5	11.1	11.0	1.1	19.8	32.1	358.3	481.5
Redcar and Cleveland	0.0	39.8	13.7	7.8	4.6	21.1	7.6	138.4	179.3	412.3
South Tyneside	0.0	10.3	18.1	4.2	16.4	1.5	19.4	17.7	250.8	338.4
Stockton-on-Tees	0.0	19.4	26.0	2.1	6.2	43.1	19.6	51.1	342.3	509.8
Sunderland	0.0	18.4	38.4	11.6	18.6	14.1	29.2	56.8	511.9	699.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>606.3</b>	<b>278.5</b>	<b>673.0</b>	<b>157.9</b>	<b>1,476.7</b>	<b>290.4</b>	<b>2,478.4</b>	<b>3,838.8</b>	<b>9,801.5</b>