



AUTUMN WHITE PAPER — SIX REQUIRED COMPONENTS

What government should put in the autumn white paper.

The White Paper must settle six things for participation by design to work. Five of them already have a vehicle inside the Cabinet statement of 31st July 2026.

What the reform requires

One to three

01 A trigger

Which decisions require participation, who decides, and what scrutiny applies when an organisation decides not to involve people? The first application is immediate: how will strong local support for a mayoral model be established and evidenced?

VEHICLE None yet. This is the one of the six the White Paper must create.

02 A standard, which government has already published

The Government Communication Service and the OECD toolkit of 9th April 2026 set out a four-level hierarchy, a 10-step process and a list of failure modes. The OECD's Catching the Deliberative Wave provides the international evidence underpinning them. The White Paper's task is to give that material force.

VEHICLE The Government Communication Service and OECD toolkit, 9th April 2026.

03 An obligation to reply

The model is embedded in UK legislation; Scottish Ministers must publish a response within six months of the report. An equivalent provision could be introduced for England, scaled to the decision's size. The Government's toolkit highlights closing the feedback loop as key to building trust.

VEHICLE Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, section 32A(9).



What does it need to work?

Four to six

04 Capability, built into the blueprint

The skills and judgments necessary for participation can be taught, practised, and assessed. The statement already commits to developing a capability blueprint, a delivery strategy, and a leadership offer, and assigns a role to the National School for Government. Participation capability should be incorporated into all four components. The methods by which this capability is developed and maintained, whether through a professional body, a government academy, or higher education, are a decision for government.

VEHICLE The capability blueprint, the delivery strategy, the leadership offer and the National School for Government.

05 Assurance, inside the architecture being built now

If participation is designed, delivered and evaluated solely by the body making the decision, there is no external check on its quality. The White Paper can decide whether participation quality should fall within the strengthened remit of the Local Audit Office, but that decision will be harder to make once the new architecture is established. The Health Bill's treatment of Healthwatch moves in the opposite direction, and the Department's own assessment identifies the risk.

VEHICLE The strengthened Local Audit Office.

06 Resourcing, and a measure in the outcome's framework

Participation requires resources, and the most economical approach isn't always the most inclusive. Governments should be cautious in promoting participatory methods as quick or cheap. An effective citizens' assembly needs representative recruitment, balanced evidence, skilled facilitation, participant compensation, accessibility, and follow-up. Insufficient funding can lead to performative behaviours the government wants to avoid.

VEHICLE The outcomes framework, now being streamlined — an opportunity to add a measure of whether people were involved and told what difference their participation made.