

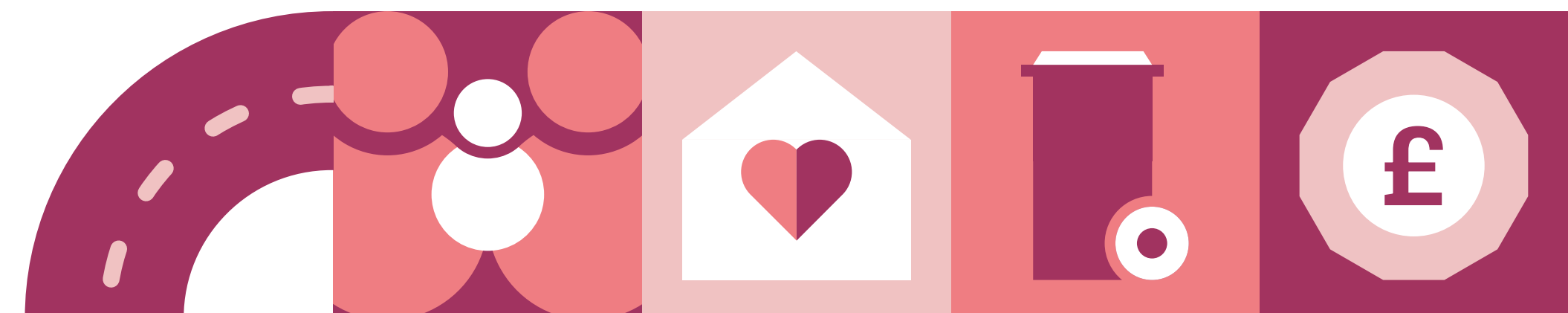
Local Government Reorganisation

in Hampshire and the Solent

**SIMPLER.
STRONGER.
SECURE.**



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Introduction

Government wants all parts of the country with two tiers of local government to reorganise. Across Hampshire and the Solent area, this involves 15 councils being replaced by a smaller number of unitary councils that deliver all services. Hampshire County Council and East Hampshire District Council have worked together to propose a new structure which will replace the existing two-tier system in our area. Our proposal, shaped by extensive engagement and robust evidence, recommends the creation of four new unitary (all-purpose) councils built on the proven upper-tier services of Hampshire County Council, Isle of Wight Council, and Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils, protecting vital services like adult social care, support for young people, household waste collection and housing.

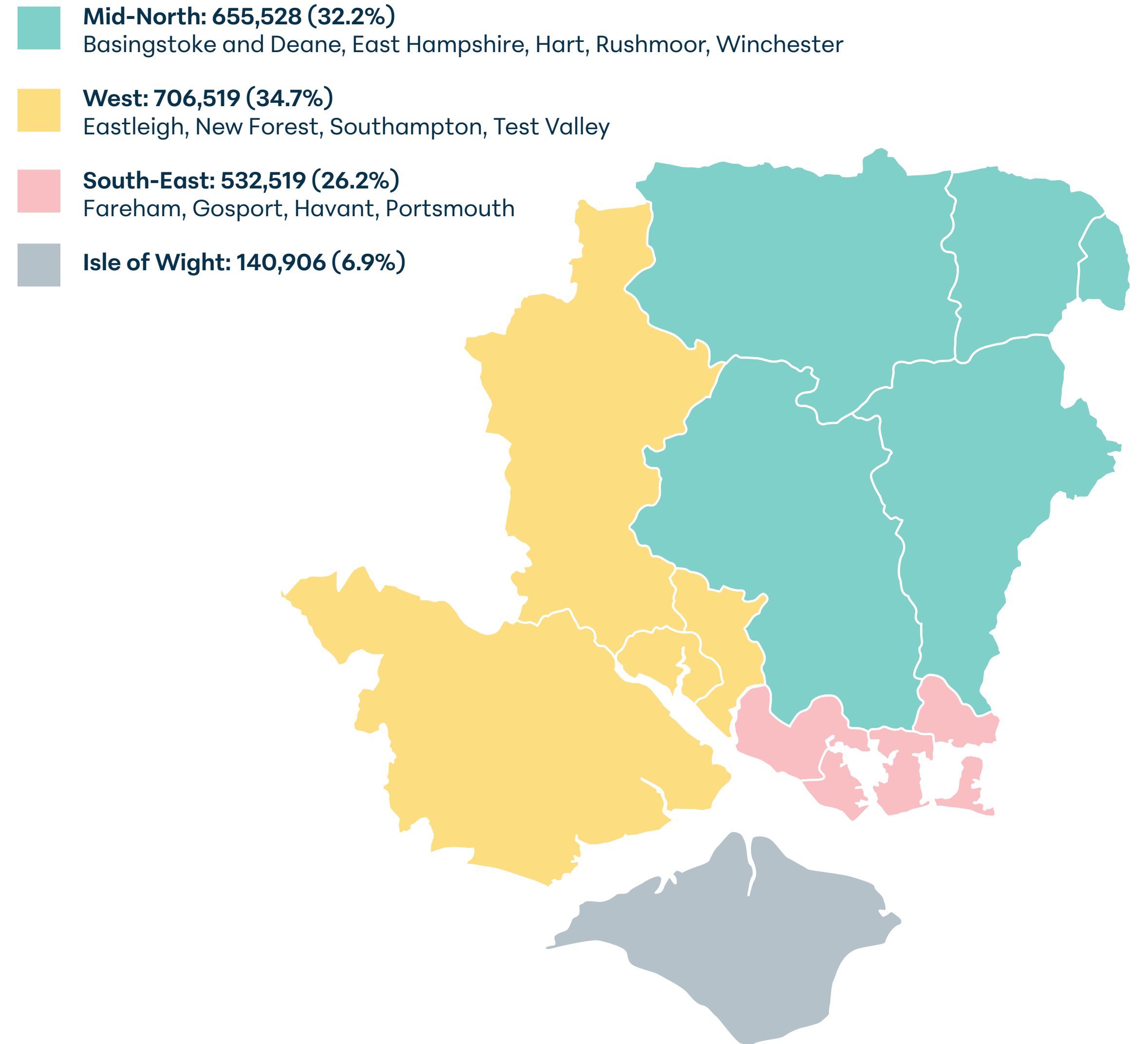
By enabling the smoothest possible transition to the new councils, avoiding the significant additional cost and risk to the taxpayer of unnecessarily breaking up services and creating brand new organisations from scratch, our proposal will boost growth in the area, benefitting our residents and businesses alike. This is the fastest, safe route to transform services across Hampshire and the Solent.



Introduction

Our proposal provides a foundation for accelerating housing, economic growth, and infrastructure, simplifies partnerships for key partners like the NHS, Police, Fire and business, cuts duplication and strengthens community participation. In developing our proposal, we have used an evidence-based approach, and unlike other proposals put forward for the area, we have rigorously assessed multiple options against the Government's criteria to identify the best solution for Hampshire and the Solent's residents.

It delivers payback within three years, enables savings of nearly £50m each year and provides a stable platform for early delivery against important priorities that benefit Hampshire residents such as economic growth and housing.





A single tier of local government, with sensible geography

Our proposal would replace the current two-tier system (county and district/borough councils) in Hampshire and the Solent with four new unitary councils. This means each area would have just one council in charge of all local services, making things simpler for residents, communities, partners and stakeholder organisations and businesses.

In one proposal backed by other councils in Hampshire, the geographically largest new Mid-Hampshire unitary would stretch from the boundary of Dorset at one extreme, all the way over to the border of Surrey at the other. Our proposal is to create councils that cover sensible, recognisable geographies that align with where people live and work.

In creating our proposed new unitary councils, the area is divided so that each council area has a more sustainable tax base, and boundaries that follow existing district lines – ensuring that no costly and time-consuming boundary changes will be needed.

The West and South-East unitaries in our proposal, which would have Southampton and Portsmouth as their major city centres respectively, allow room for those cities to grow and for local housing needs to be met.

Our structure also locates the two National Parks in different unitaries so that the pressures these put on the land available to build new homes is not felt exclusively by one unitary.

This structure also enables homes to be built near areas earmarked for employment and major transport routes, helping residents stay connected to essential services and everyday infrastructure.

Our proposed structure is based on strong evidence, including detailed robust financial analysis, and feedback from local people and organisations. The aim is to make services easier to access, reduce confusion, and ensure decisions are made closer to the communities they affect. The proposal explains clearly how these new councils will work and what benefits they are expected to bring, such as better value for money and more joined-up services.

This single tier of government will allow us to make considerable savings of around £50m each year whilst still maintaining a good level of resource in all our important local services, and responsive local representation for all the areas covered.



The right size for efficiency and resilience

The new councils are designed to be big enough to work efficiently and handle financial challenges, but not so big that they lose touch with local needs. Each council will serve at least 500,000 people (except the Isle of Wight, which is treated as a special case because of its unique situation as an island). This size means services can save money by sharing resources across a wider area and buying things in bulk, while still being able to focus on local priorities.

The plan shows how the change will save around £50 million a year after set-up costs, and these savings will be used to improve services and keep council tax fair. Unlike other proposals put forward in our area, we are confident that our financial analysis is evidenced based and realistic, and has drawn on the work of independent experts and our own finance professionals.

We know that having a greater number of smaller councils would mean creating considerable additional organisational infrastructure in each of these additional councils, like senior managers and additional IT systems.

Having fewer councils means we would be able to base large services like education or social care on systems that already being used in Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council. By creating three councils of substantial size, alongside the Isle of Wight Council, we can make sure these future organisations start off strong and stable and more public money can be spent on delivering services for residents – not spent on creating further additional new councils.

In the long term, councils of this size will also be more capable of withstanding the ups and downs of the economy making them more resilient. Less resilient councils that are struggling financially will need to focus all their resources on their most important services (care for vulnerable people), which may require cuts to other services, and increases in council tax.



High quality, sustainable public services

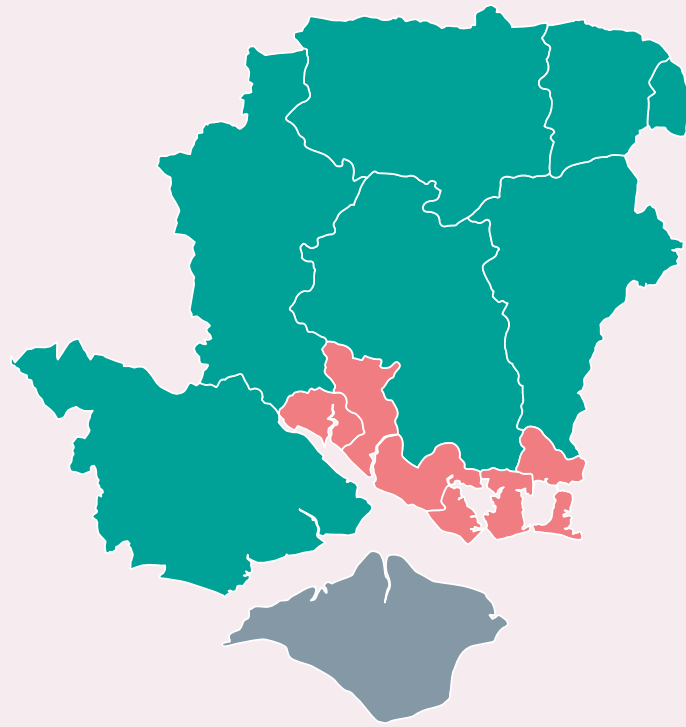
The main goal of our proposal is to make sure everyone gets good, reliable services, like social care, education, and waste collection, no matter where they live. By having fewer, larger councils, the plan avoids splitting up important services or creating lots of new, small organisations that might struggle because they will have to set up all these important services from scratch. In our proposal the new councils will build on what already works well, keeping strong teams and proven systems in place, and using this as a stable foundation on which to drive ambitious organisational transformation and change.

This approach reduces the risk of things going wrong during the change and helps protect the most vulnerable people.

We have compared our four-council model very carefully against models involving three and five councils. Unlike the other proposals that have been put forward, ours is the result of detailed analysis of how different numbers of councils might affect the resilience and quality of services. Other proposals that have been put forward did not analyse different numbers of councils – only different configurations of councils, each with the same number of authorities.



Three councils



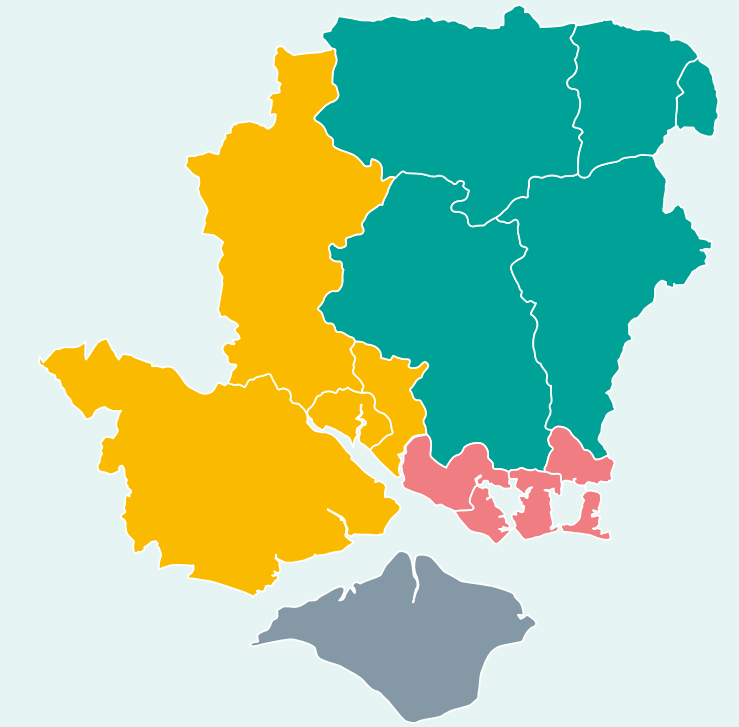
Having just three councils across Hampshire and the Solent would make very good savings but would make it difficult to align services in the areas where people live, with those in the places they work. It would make it more difficult to support the local identities of our major cities and iconic landscapes – and it would make it incredibly difficult to meet the Government’s housing targets for each area.

Five councils



Having five councils would mean significant additional costs, rather than any savings. By our forecasts, a five-council model would prove financially unsustainable to the extent that this would require significant additional funding from the Government or Council Tax payers as well as a decline in the quality and effectiveness of services.

Four councils



As well as being financially sound, our four-council proposal is also designed to enable councils to work together and with other vital partners (like the police and NHS) to improve services and find new ways to help residents. Our model meets the aspirations of local partner organisations, who have told us that they prefer fewer touchpoints with local services.

Fewer, more financially resilient councils means that there would be more ability for the new organisations to invest in prevention – working collaboratively with public service partners to manage demand across the sector and secure better outcomes for residents. Through economic and housing growth, our structure enables residents to have better access to homes and jobs, creating better opportunities which will help to address the root causes of ill health, inequality and deprivation.

By making services more resilient and less costly, we will get through the transition more smoothly and quickly start to see the transformational benefits of the change so we can provide more innovative services. Within a short period, we’ll be making services better, not just cheaper – and with the confidence that services will be able to keep going even when times are tough.



Meeting local needs and listening to local views

Our proposal has been shaped by talking to thousands of residents, community groups, businesses, and other organisations. People said they wanted councils that are easy to deal with, that understand local identity, and that can respond quickly to local issues. Partners said that they wanted as few touch points with new authorities as possible, as well as simpler relationships between the main organisations that work together in the public sector for the good of our residents.

The plan keeps local voices at the heart of decision-making, with a detailed vision for the improvements that can be made to empower local people and catalyse greater public engagement – through proposed neighbourhood committees and stronger links with parish and town councils. We are clear that simply having slightly bigger or slightly smaller Unitary Councils does not mean that Councils suddenly become more or less local – what is important is how these new councils develop the capacity and culture to prioritise and promote engagement with local neighbourhoods and communities.

The configuration of the councils in our proposal also ensures that both urban and rural areas are fairly represented, and that services can be tailored to different communities.

Our proposal explains how concerns about losing local identity, or having services become too remote, will be addressed, and how the new councils will keep listening to residents as things change.





Supporting devolution and regional growth

The economy in Hampshire and the Solent area is of national importance, and by putting in place the right structure for local government, alongside the planned Mayoral Combined Authority for Hampshire and the Solent, we can supercharge growth across the wider region.

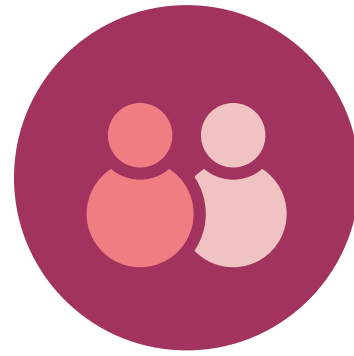
Our economy is already worth £81 billion, with 90,000 businesses in the area and more than a million jobs. With devolution bringing more powers and funding from central Government, helping to drive economic growth, improve transport, and support new housing, it'll be important that the new councils can make the most of these opportunities. Our four-unitary proposal is designed around functional economic areas, supporting growth where it's needed most. It reflects the strength of Hampshire's city regions and connects key productivity corridors.

Having fewer and broadly equally sized unitary authorities working with the Mayor and the Mayoral Combined Authority can strengthen regional collaboration, reduce bureaucracy, and ensure public services are delivered more equitably and efficiently across our area, aligning with the Government's priorities of empowering communities and driving inclusive growth.

By aligning boundaries with real labour markets, we strengthen partnerships between councils, employers, and education providers to join up employment, training, and business support to help more people into secure, better-paid work.

Our structure features fewer and more balanced unitaries at the Mayoral table, fostering shared priorities and a stronger understanding of both rural and urban issues – creating a better foundation for growth across Hampshire.





Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Building on our engagement with over 200 parish and town councils over the summer, our plan embeds 'neighbourhood empowerment' at the heart of our vision for the future unitary councils. We are confident that LGR represents an opportunity to rethink and reshape neighbourhood empowerment. We want to create new councils that proactively work with communities, voluntary and community organisations, and town and parish councils (where they exist) and empower them with the tools and support to shape local services and drive local solutions in their neighbourhoods.

In large unitary councils, neighbourhood empowerment is essential for ensuring that council strategies and services are delivered in a way that reflects and respects the unique character, heritage and culture of different kinds of communities and neighbourhoods – whether these are urban, rural, coastal, relatively deprived or relatively affluent. There can be no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to public service delivery in a region as broad and diverse as Hampshire and the Solent. We plan to establish future unitary councils so that they are flexible and responsive to the needs of different communities, listen to a wide range of local voices, and actively enable local people to realise their ambitions for their local area.

Building on the good practice that already takes place in Hampshire and the Solent and other areas of the country, the future unitary councils

could consider a variety of approaches for empowering communities and neighbourhoods. These include: involving communities in the drafting and evaluation of key council strategies; making 'participatory budgeting' grants available for residents to allocate to local projects; supporting community-led action to improve health and wellbeing in neighbourhoods; and establishing neighbourhood committees that provide regular opportunities for residents, business, town and parish councils and community groups to influence local decision-making and activities taking place in their area.

We believe that four new unitary councils would deliver a more effective and inclusive programme of neighbourhood empowerment than five unitary councils. Four strong financially secure unitary councils would allow for sustained resource to be allocated to empowerment approaches that listen to and include all local communities, including those who would not normally have time, feel able nor want to attend formal consultations. Our plan is based on the principle that **how** a council works effectively with communities within its boundary is more critical to neighbourhood empowerment than the size of the council's geographic area – and financial stability is essential for councils to deliver genuine and inclusive opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment successfully.