

Foreword

Close enough to be local, big enough to stay strong.

This proposal presents a bold and unified vision for the future of local government in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. At the heart of this proposal is a commitment to our communities. Our communities are not just areas on a map – they are places where people live, raise families, build businesses and care for one another.

The current two-tier system, which has remained largely unchanged since 1974, except for the creation of three unitary councils that have already achieved efficiency savings associated with the removal of the two-tier system, has created fragmentation and inefficiencies that hinder our ability to respond to local needs. Since then, our population has grown, digital technology has transformed how services are delivered and residents rightly expect more responsive, efficient and joined up local services that we know can be addressed by our proposed unitary councils.

With the decision made by government to initiate local government reorganisation, we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reimagine how we can build councils that are close enough to communities to be local but big enough to have a sustainable future. Councils that deliver transformed services that meet local needs, rather than larger 'one size fits



all' type approaches. Councils that reflect our different areas and will listen and improve things. Councils where local services are not just delivered but designed for the modern world, co-created and tailored to local community needs and with people at the heart of every decision and where every pound spent goes further.

Grasping this opportunity with both hands, we initially came together as a group of 15 authorities across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. We are now working together as 11 unitary, district and borough councils serving communities across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, to co-design proposals for a local government system that is more agile, accountable, sustainable and better equipped to serve our communities – today and in the future.

Driven by the needs of our communities, we are proposing the creation of four new unitary councils for mainland Hampshire, focused on each of the four anchors of the major urban economies and population centres of Southampton, Portsmouth, Winchester and Basingstoke. We all agree that the Isle of Wight Council, as an island unitary authority, should remain independent to reflect its unique island geography

and circumstances. However, our proposal looks to ensure integration with the Isle of Wight where beneficial to ensure local government reorganisation succeeds for all.

Strengthened collaboration, backed by investment in transformation and digital innovation, will enable us to work seamlessly, ensuring services are joined up, accessible and tailored to the unique needs of each community. It will also empower local decision-making so we can meet today's challenges without losing the local knowledge and relationships that residents value.

Financial sustainability is central to this vision. Our proposal will reduce duplication and deliver on the scale needed to invest in innovation and modernise critical services. It will also provide a stronger foundation for economic growth, enabling

councils to work more effectively with businesses, developers and regional partners to unlock the economic potential of each of the areas.

Whilst we are clear that the two-tier system is both inefficient and confusing to residents and its removal for the area is necessary for a modern, responsive, and resident centred model of local government, equally we are realistic about the scale of the financial challenge facing the area as a whole and that cannot be solved by local government reorganisation alone. Our proposal is clear, when viewed across the whole area, that it will realise substantial savings, provide more joined up and modern services for residents and create a better opportunity for economic growth. However, each new unitary council will still need to address the legacy deficits of its predecessor authorities.

This document reflects our shared ambition to create a modern and responsive local government system that truly reflects the different communities we serve.

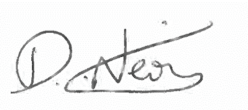


We owe it to our residents and the future generations to come together to get this right. By embracing change and working together, we can build a future where every community thrives, every voice is heard, and every service delivers real value. We strongly believe this proposal will deliver lasting transformation and improvement and we ask for your support in making it a reality.

**Basingstoke and Deane
Borough Council**
Leader Cllr Paul Harvey



Hart District Council
Leader Cllr David Neighbour

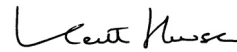


Portsmouth City Council
Leader Cllr Steve Pitt*

Test Valley Borough Council
Leader Cllr Philip North



Eastleigh Borough Council
Leader Cllr Keith House



Havant Borough Council
Leader Cllr Phil Munday



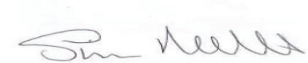
Rushmoor Borough Council
Leader Cllr Gareth Williams



Winchester City Council
Leader Cllr Martin Tod



Fareham Borough Council
Leader Cllr Simon Martin



New Forest District Council
Leader Cllr Jill Cleary



Southampton City Council
Leader Cllr Alexander Winning



* See page 17

Executive summary

Local government reorganisation presents an opportunity to take a fresh look at how councils operate to build a system that best serves Hampshire and the Isle of Wight's residents, now and in the future.



Fully embracing this opportunity, while balancing the size and diversity of the area, our group brings together the majority of councils (11 of 15) in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. We have worked collaboratively to shape the future of local government for our region; built on the foundation of our existing population centres and economic areas to reflect the way people live.

We agree unanimously that a five-unitary council structure, with four new mainland unitaries plus the Isle of Wight remaining independent, provides the most effective solution for local government reorganisation in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Our proposal, set out in this document, is the best way to support a balanced and effective Mayoral Combined Authority to achieve the shared vision for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. It is backed by our robust and comprehensive options appraisal methodology in line with the government's criteria.

As part of this proposal, three variations for four new mainland

unitaries have been identified, to which councils have differing support for. All three variations fully meet the government criteria and are based on having a unitary council focused on each of the four major population centres and economies of Southampton, Portsmouth, Winchester and Basingstoke, with the Isle of Wight remaining independent. This fully aligns with the government's view of the important role cities and larger towns play as 'economic or academic' anchors for designing new unitary councils.

We strongly believe our four new unitary councils on the mainland, plus the Isle of Wight, would best meet the government's criteria and best serve our communities into the future by:

- driving economic growth and housing delivery.
- delivering high quality and sustainable public services with a focus on innovation and transformation to improve outcomes for communities.
- achieving significant savings while being large enough to be financially sustainable whilst also being committed to local people and local communities.

- unlocking and maximising devolution arrangements, working effectively alongside the new elected Mayor for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight as constituent members of the strategic authority.
- effectively engaging, empowering and serving their local communities by providing opportunities for residents to shape local decisions.

The four new unitary councils on the mainland, with an average population size of 500,000, provide significant scale in service delivery and will reduce costs accordingly while still being connected to the communities they serve. Our commitment to transformation will ensure services are tailored to respond to local needs and improve outcomes for residents.

We also strongly believe that the Isle of Wight meets the criteria of exceptional circumstances to remain as an existing island unitary authority due to its unique local identity and geography and the fact most services and infrastructure would just need to be duplicated on the Island, were they to be run from a unitary council on the mainland, due to the barriers provided by water-only access.

However, we will ensure that any genuine opportunities for collaboration with our four new unitary councils on the mainland are maximised. This will include an enhanced partnership whereby the Isle of Wight Council works closely alongside the four new mainland unitaries to explore each opportunity they progress for transformation and innovation, as they move forward through implementation of our proposal and beyond, to see how they could be applied to the Island either on a shared basis or individually.





Later in this document in section 4 we set out how our proposal for four new mainland unitaries, and the three variations being put forward, deliver strongly on each of the government criteria. We also set out in section 5 why the Isle of Wight Council should continue to remain independent aligned to the government criteria as requested in the interim feedback letter from government. However, the summary below provides an overview of the key strengths in line with the criteria, highlighting why our four new-mainland and Isle of Wight unitary proposal is the best option for the future of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Criteria 1: A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.

- **Balanced configuration:** Ensures equitable distribution of resources by avoiding disparities in tax base, population, and GVA among new unitary councils.
- **Tailored governance and leadership:** Strong local leadership with strategies customised to the unique geographies of each unitary area to drive economic growth, high quality service delivery and improved outcomes.
- **Economic development and innovation:** Creates a focused environment for business innovation and economic growth by leveraging strengths and fostering partnerships tailored to the needs of the different economic areas.
- **Infrastructure and housing:** Prioritises shaping infrastructure and addressing housing needs with tailored approaches to support delivery and meet local requirements.
- **Transport and connectivity:** Aligns travel geographies with unitary boundaries to enable integrated transport planning, improving connectivity, and reducing congestion.
- **Community and skills development:** Invests in people to build inclusive workforces, addressing skills gaps and raising living standards to support growth ambitions.
- **Rural and local engagement:** Addresses unique rural challenges and enhances local engagement by aligning governance with community identities and travel-to-work patterns.

Criteria 2: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.

- **Financial sustainability:** Addresses current financial challenges by reducing duplicated functions in the two-tier system, centralising back-office support, and empowering each authority to manage its budget based on local needs through place focused transformation and innovation, thereby improving financial resilience.
- **Efficiency and improving capacity:** Brings together capital and revenue planning and enhances transformation teams, our proposal achieves savings through transformation and service redesign tailored to local needs, improving overall service delivery. Recognising that Portsmouth and Southampton have already made many of these efficiencies and can share their learning and experience.
- **Economic growth and local focus:** Enables enhanced economic growth by forming unitary structures around distinct economic areas, ensuring opportunities are realised and challenges addressed to maximise economic potential.
- **Population balance:** Creates balanced new unitary structures that reflect economic areas and local identities

Criteria 3: Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

- **Local connections and community focus:** Effectiveness of services, particularly in areas such as adult social care, is driven by local connections and understanding community needs. Our proposal includes co-producing services with local partners through a total place approach and maintaining local relationships which bigger unitaries, serving even larger communities and areas, cannot replicate.

- **Place-based governance:** Captures local intelligence and prioritises prevention. Our proposal aligns services with the lived realities of communities, ensuring they are delivered responsively.
- **Service design and transformation:** Our proposal is based on creating genuinely new unitaries through a comprehensive approach to service design, focusing on high-quality and sustainable services. Our proposal has prioritised collaboration and transformation opportunities, ensuring services are tailored to local needs. The Isle of Wight Council, whilst remaining independent, will have a transformation partnership with the new unitaries to ensure opportunities are maximised for the Island where appropriate.
- **Adult social care:** Our model focusses on localised neighbourhood service delivery, budgetary savings, and data-driven decision-making. It aligns with the NHS 10-year plan, focusing on prevention and community resilience.
- **Children and young people:** Promotes localised governance and collaboration, addressing educational challenges and supporting children with complex needs. Our proposal emphasises prevention, early intervention, and community-centred approaches.
- **Economic Growth and Strategic Planning:** Aligning services with local economic and social geographies, fostering collaboration and co-investment in infrastructure.
- **Public sector reform:** Aligns with the wider public sector reform agenda, focusing on place-based prevention and tailored collaborative service delivery to meet community needs effectively in each of our areas.

Criteria 4: Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

- **Collaborative working:** Extensive collaboration among 12 councils over six months, involving key stakeholder groups and regular meetings with leaders, chief executives, section 151 officers, monitoring officers, directors and heads of service. This collaborative approach ensures that the proposal is robust, evidence-based, and informed by a wide range of perspectives.
- **Informed by local views:** Our proposal is shaped by joint local government efforts and engagement with local people and partners. A joint survey was conducted to gather views from residents, ensuring that the proposal reflects public sentiment and priorities. A series of workshops have been held with businesses and partners including from the public, voluntary and community sector and town and parish councils. Discussion has also been held with local members of parliament. We are grateful to all of our communities and partners for helping to shape this proposal. This approach prioritises community identity and future-proofs local government to effectively respond to local needs.
- **Travel for work and leisure activities:** Builds on our strong travel-to-work ecosystem, supported by motorways, rail corridors, bus networks, ferries, and active-travel routes. The future unitary councils are aligned with key population and economic centres as anchors, providing opportunities to streamline travel services.

- **Local identity:** Recognises and preserves the unique character and contributions of the North, Mid, South East, and South West areas and the Isle of Wight. Each area has distinct geographic, historical, economic and cultural identities, which are actively preserved and empowered through our proposal.

Criteria 5: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- **Strategic planning and local delivery:** A Combined/Strategic Authority with five well-balanced unitaries (four new unitaries on the mainland and the Isle of Wight Council) as constituent authorities. This structure enables strategic planning and coordination for over 2.1 million people, while the unitary councils focus on local delivery.
- **Effective decision-making:** With five constituent members, our model provides a strong foundation for decision-making. It aims to avoid the pitfalls of smaller Combined Authorities with less constituent members, which may operate as rivals rather than come together as a cohesive governance body. Our approach draws on the success of Greater Manchester.
- **Balanced new unitary authorities:** Populations between 400,000 and 600,000 of the new unitaries, ensuring balanced representation and avoiding democratic deficits. Our model also includes the Isle of Wight, emphasising balanced representation and collaboration with non-constituent members like NHS bodies and National Parks.

Criteria 6: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

- **Enhanced local representation:** Localised unitary authorities, which would allow for governance that is more tailored and representative. This structure would enable local leaders to better understand and address the unique challenges and opportunities within their areas.
- **Improved service delivery:** Aligning governance structures with local needs and engaging local stakeholders in decision making, means our proposal will deliver services more effectively and efficiently. This will allow for the customisation of services to better fit the specific requirements of each community, leading to improved outcomes in areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **Proposed councillor ratios:** Future indicative councillor ratios are designed to support the individual demands of the four new mainland unitary configurations and the communities they serve. The proposed configurations aim to optimise the number of councillors to ensure effective representation and governance with an enhanced ward councillor role. The Isle of Wight would continue with its existing councillor numbers.

- **Enhanced neighbourhood working and governance:**

A localised place-based approach will see enhanced neighbourhood engagement and delivery models.

We will co-design with communities and local partners neighbourhood governance arrangements that best meet local requirements for each area. This will deliver decision making at the level closest to individuals and communities that improves delivery and enables efficiencies.

Our proposal is comprehensive, and evidence based, providing a bold platform for further economic growth and investment across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. It unlocks the true devolution potential for our area and will tackle local housing pressures.

Developed by all 11 councils, our vision for local government in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight for the future is:

We will deliver high-quality, locally tailored services that focus on prevention and long-term sustainability. By building strong, people-centred communities and harnessing the strengths of our local economies, we will drive inclusive growth and create vibrant, resilient places where everyone can thrive.



This proposal is submitted on behalf of the following existing district, borough and unitary councils:

