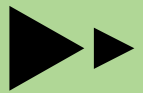# A proposal for three evenly-balanced unitary councils for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Leading the county with agility, resilience, and ambition

▶▶ Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

CONTENTS

Appendices

This document sets out our shared, ambitious vision for the future of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. We have worked collaboratively, across the county, across councils and across the political spectrum, to develop a proposal that we believe is the best option to meet the needs of our residents and businesses and deliver against all the criteria set out by Government.

It is important we emphasise that we did not ask for local government reorganisation (LGR), but we recognise that if this is to happen, it is incumbent upon us to put forward the very best option for our residents, businesses and the future of local government. We want to create a stronger, more responsive local government that is better equipped to meet the evolving needs of our communities. Our objective has therefore been to develop a proposal that will:

1. **Support economic growth, housing and infrastructure delivery.**

2. **Secure financial efficiency, resilience and the ability to withstand financial shocks.**

3. **Innovate to deliver high-quality, sustainable public services, responsive to local need and capable of supporting wider public sector reform.**

4. **Unlock devolution.**

5. **Provide for strong democratic accountability, representation and community empowerment.**

Absolutely critical for us, throughout this process, has been a need to ensure we value and protect Staffordshire's unique local identities, places and the views of our residents'. Our proposal is the only one being put forward in Staffordshire that respects our residents clearly stated desire for a set of councils that keep services based on local needs, with local councillors that listen. It also saves money, while keeping services running alongside keeping what makes our areas special.

At the core of our submission is the fact that Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is made up of many communities with differing local identities – it is this that makes the area so very special. We believe it is vital that any new local government structures seek to preserve and enhance the unique and distinct identities of our villages, towns and cities, while simultaneously driving economic growth, improving outcomes for residents and transforming public services.

South Staffordshire

Lichfield District

Tamworth

> **We propose the creation of three new unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent; one in the North, one in the South-East and one in the South-West.**

In October 2025, the District Councils' Network released new analysis of existing unitary councils, using publicly available data, which shows that the biggest unitary councils do not outperform their smaller counterparts. Our proposal proves this; we believe it will create equally sized, well-balanced councils, each serving a manageable population better than current structures allow.

Our proposal will enhance local accessibility and accountability, offering a more connected approach than alternative options that create larger, more remote entities. When we examine the evidence, it is clear smaller, well-planned unitary councils offer the best opportunity to deliver transformation, financial savings, sustainability and improved accountablility.

We believe this model also better reflects existing community structures, resident lifestyles and work patterns, ensuring that local government remains deeply rooted in the places it serves. Most importantly, **75% of respondents to our engagement in our three council areas (66% of respondents across the six southern district and boroughs), told us that they overwhelmingly support the creation of two unitary councils in the South.**

Our proposal paves the way for the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, led by an elected mayor. We believe equally sized and balanced councils, as we are proposing, will offer a more representative and importantly 'local view' to the new Mayor, to support a strategic and coordinated vision across the county and enable Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to fairly take advantage of the government's devolution offer and further improve outcomes for the residents and businesses across the county. To deliver effective devolution that makes a positive impact for our residents and businesses, it is critical that the Strategic Authority can call on constituent members who have a deep understanding of place. Our proposal would also allow Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to engage constructively with neighbouring areas such as Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire, should the footprint for the Strategic Authority be required by government to expand.

Cannock
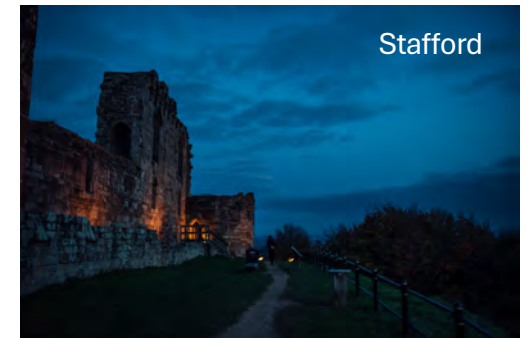
Stafford

East Staffordshire

A three-unitary model across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent would enable:

- Economic growth, housing and infrastructure delivery.

- Efficient, resident-focused services that remain agile and resilient. Our financial analysis clearly shows that a three-unitary model is financially viable and able to withstand financial shocks.

- Decision making close to communities, enhancing transparency and responsiveness, avoiding risks of overcentralisation.

- Distinct community identities to be respected and reflected in governance, rather than subsumed into a broader structure.

- Maximise the opportunities for devolution, creating a balanced partnership within the emerging strategic authority, encouraging collaboration rather than competition.

We, of course, acknowledge the risks of change, particularly in statutory services for children and adults, whilst noting the status quo does not deliver for service users consistently or council taxpayers efficiently in these areas. Our approach will be to continue our positive collaboration to manage these risks by changing step-by-step incrementally, leveraging economies of scale and scope through shared services where it makes sense, whilst eliminating waste and directing resources to the frontline services providers locally in our communities.

Our analysis shows that only our proposal enables additional savings to be unlocked each year through localising these important people services. We also firmly believe that our proposal for three unitary councils will be the best option to transform adult and children's social care for the better. Embedding prevention, early intervention and community power in transforming these services and most importantly improving outcomes.

We believe our proposal for three unitary councils is the best option for our county, the only option being submitted that meets all of Government's criteria and, most importantly, respects what matters to our residents. We look forward to working together with our communities, partners, and dedicated public servants to create a brighter future for everyone in our area.

Councillor Doug Pullen
Leader of Lichfield District Council

Councillor Kath Perry MBE
Leader of South Staffordshire Council

Councillor Carol Dean
Leader of Tamworth Borough Council

Executive summary

Driving **prosperity**,
preserving **identity**

This proposal outlines a compelling vision for a modernised local government structure in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, designed to strengthen community identity while transforming public services, and driving economic growth.

By aligning local government with well-defined and understood places, **we will create a system that is more responsive, effective and attuned to the diverse needs of the people, communities and businesses** that call our county home.

While we did not ask for it, we recognise that LGR is an opportunity to improve local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which we know faces significant challenges like other parts of the country.

Spiralling costs in adult and children's social care consume nearly 70% of all council tax revenue, alongside a growing financial burden from increasing homelessness across the county. While Stoke-on-Trent City Council is already in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), it is certainly not the only council struggling - some councils face budget deficits, historical debts, and limited borrowing capacity.

Rising to the challenge of ambitious housing targets, while protecting green belt land and managing infrastructure needs is a key issue all councils face. Planning departments struggle to retain quality staff with in-depth local knowledge, leading to delays and legal challenges. Balancing development with environmental commitments and biodiversity recovery is increasingly difficult under fragmented governance. Recent political shifts have introduced uncertainty in policy direction and priorities.

South Staffordshire

Lichfield District

Through LGR, we want to create a system that removes complexity and duplication, empowers our communities and achieves a quality in public service delivery that becomes a beacon for our sector. Our proposal will:

1. **Improve efficiency and financial sustainability**
   - Reducing duplication of services and administrative overheads.
   - Enabling strategic pooling of resources and better financial planning.

2. **Strengthen local identity and representation**
   - Aligning governance with natural communities and travel-to-work areas, improving democratic accountability.
   - Ensuring fair representation across diverse areas of the county.

3. **Integrate planning and service delivery**
   - Allowing for joined-up housing, transport, and environmental planning.
   - Supporting holistic approaches to social care, homelessness, and SEND services.

4. **Enhance strategic capacity**
   - Attracting investment, managing infrastructure, and delivering on national priorities.
   - Making it easier for central government and partners to work with fewer, stronger councils.

5. **Simplify governance and accountability**
   - Reducing the number of councillors and council leaders, streamlining decision making.
   - Improving transparency and responsiveness to residents.

Lichfield District

Cannock

Our proposal will also **unlock devolution and create a meaningful economic footprint upon which a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent can be established,** in line with the government's ambitions for growth. Three unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will be better balanced in size, financial sustainability and influence, encouraging collaboration rather than competition. The three unitary model will also offer a more representative and importantly 'local' view to the new mayor. This is the best option for residents and businesses of the county, for our partner public sector agencies and the new Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority. The Strategic Authority will need the new unitary authorities to be focused on sustainably delivering the services that residents and businesses need, and able to adopt a coherent and strategic approach to planning for growth, as it uses its devolved powers to deliver on national missions, ensuring a strategic regional approach to skills, transport and planning.

Tamworth

Lichfield District

> **The three unitary model will also offer a more representative and importantly 'local' view to the new mayor.**

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has a **strong track record in economic growth;** key to this has been the high-performing economic regeneration teams that exist in our district and boroughs. The three new unitary councils will need to work hand-in-hand with the Strategic Authority to maximise the economic growth opportunities that devolution will unlock.

The three unitary model will enable targeted investment in infrastructure and regeneration, foster close and responsive relationships with local businesses, and support the development of strategic employment sites. By aligning council boundaries with functional economic geographies, as we are proposing, each new authority will be empowered to drive growth tailored to the unique strengths and opportunities of its area, supporting the government's agenda and maximising local prosperity. The three unitary model is the only option that will facilitate a greater understanding of the needs of local businesses and the infrastructure

required to deliver the growth and prosperity of the areas. The three unitary model will enable the development of close, responsive relationships with businesses - an approach which we know bears fruit in a way that can only be achieved at a local level and delivers growth in line with government's aspirations.

The three unitary model **will support the delivery of the government's ambitious housing targets.** It is vital that planners have a detailed understanding of their area, including sensitivities, challenges and opportunities. This will be even more critical to deliver the scale and pace of housing growth required. In larger authorities, planning resources are often focused on a just a few key geographical areas or projects, missing out on spotting opportunities for further growth or development that can work sympathetically with existing communities.

Stafford

> **The three unitary model will enable the development of 'close' responsive relationships.**

Strong local relationships with stakeholders are also key to meeting the housing targets. Our three unitary model will ensure proposed developments receive careful management and collaboration with stakeholders and communities. It combines the benefits of scale with the agility and community trust that are vital for success. Three unitary authorities will enable targeted and responsive housing focused on the respective needs and requirements of each distinct area. Having a unitary council focused on the local area will ensure that housing growth can respond to and be driven by the unique demographic and economic needs of each area, putting in place the appropriate infrastructure and access to services that are required and lacking today, and ensure local communities and small villages are not negatively impacted. This can only be successfully done when councils remain close to the communities they serve.

We believe Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent needs a local government structure that combines strategic scale with this local responsiveness. Each of the three new unitary councils will be able to focus on the distinct demographic, economic, and housing needs of its communities, ensuring growth is properly supported by the right infrastructure and services. This targeted approach would also allow meaningful engagement with residents, making the case for new development in ways that protect and strengthen local towns, villages, and rural communities.

> **Alongside significant economic and democratic benefits, our analysis, which has been independently validated by external LGR specialist advisors, clearly demonstrates our proposal significantly improves financial efficiency.**

Our work has found that our proposal for three new unitary authorities is financially viable, resulting in significant **recurring annual net savings**. Creating two unitary councils in the South of the county will deliver £15.1m net annual savings and a payback period of under four years. A Northern unitary is estimated to produce a further £21.2m of net annual savings.

Despite this potential for significant annual savings through reorganisation and transformation, we note that much of this may be needed to deal with budget pressures forecast to come down the line – in particular the expected implications of the Fair Funding Review and concurrent need to manage the ever-increasing demand pressures faced by high-risk services such as children's services, adult social care, housing and homelessness support.

Lichfield District

Lichfield District

However, we believe our proposal for three unitary councils is the best option to transform Adult and Children's Social Care for the better. Using data from LG Inform, our proposal for three unitary councils also shows that through localising Adult and Children's Services – improving care for vulnerable children and adults and reducing cost through focusing on prevention and early help – an improvement in the cost per capita for these services could unlock an additional £22m saving annually across Staffordshire (this does not include additional savings to Stoke-on-Trent City Council's people services through a similar approach).

The three unitary council proposal is the only one that can release these additional savings.

A commitment to early intervention and prevention across all service areas is a core principle of our proposed new unitary councils. Investing in proactive, upstream approaches, such as targeted family support, community-based health initiatives and early help for vulnerable groups is paramount to improving long term outcomes. We will reduce demand on high-cost services and deliver better value for money. We will embed prevention into commissioning, performance management, and partnership strategies.

Tamworth

South Staffordshire

A three-council solution provides the best platform to deliver a robust response to the challenges faced by these statutory people services (adults and children's) and will help to ensure the delivery of better outcomes for individuals in receipt of care and support. It will also enable more responsive and efficient services. In particular, the three unitary model provides a better service delivery platform to:

Adult Social Care

» Manage future demand through locally-driven preventative approaches across all adult social care service activities and reduce long-term care costs.

» Fully embed place-based and local community delivery models (working closely with the voluntary sector and the NHS), improving our ability to tailor services to local needs and local capacity and deliver a better, more sustainable workforce model.

» Further develop and enhance the strategic commissioning model and approach to market management to deliver more efficient and effective, local care and support services.

Children's Services

» Maintain a close focus on local communities to promote early help and community support.

» Maintain quality and oversight by ensuring leaders are close to practice, building local strategic relationships and ensuring that strategic outcomes are implemented at a local level.

» Develop strategic commissioning approaches and capital spending programmes to ensure that sufficiency, value and outcomes are achieved in key areas including school places, SEND placements and local provision.

These changes will deliver better service quality and better outcomes for residents and drive savings and efficiency gains in these services, as outlined in the Criterion 2 section of this document, while harnessing local strengths, working with the government agenda for reforms and building strong relationships with children, young people, adult social care service users, their families and communities.

South Staffordshire

Since the invitation to submit proposals for LGR on 6th February 2025, the councils in the South of the county have worked together diligently, with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council, to develop a proposal that ensures we remain close to the communities we serve, connected to residents and partners with no democratic deficit, and transform service design and delivery.

Our joint submission from the Leaders of Lichfield District, South Staffordshire District, and Tamworth Borough Councils aligns fully with the proposal from Stoke-on-Trent City Council in the North and covers the whole geography of the county, while necessarily focussing on the background and rationale to our recommendations for the South of the county.

> ▶ **Our approach is fundamentally 'bottom up' and community led, ensuring the voices and needs of our residents are at the heart of any proposed changes.**

This is supported by evidence-based modelling of service disaggregation and budget aggregation, providing a robust foundation for our recommendations. Crucially, our proposal is aligned with national devolution priorities and ministerial ambitions for more efficient and effective local governance.

Our interim submission in March 2025 highlighted a shared commitment to explore governance models that best serve our diverse communities. We shortlisted two options for the South of the county, compatible with the emerging option from Stoke-on-Trent City Council covering the North, based on an initial analysis against the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) criteria. We have since undertaken a comprehensive options analysis for both options; a single unitary council covering the whole of the South of the county, or two unitary councils splitting the area (South-West Staffordshire and South-East Staffordshire). This analysis has been based on the MHCLG criteria and factors such as geographical demographics, financials, service demand (current and projected), community engagement and the ability to deliver devolution.

East Staffordhire

Stafford

Following this analysis, we believe that two unitary councils covering the South of the county would best serve our people, both now and in the future.

Our proposed new unitary authorities are:

### New unitary authority
North Staffordshire

Former districts, boroughs and city
Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme

New unitary authority
South-West Staffordshire

Former districts and boroughs
Stafford, Cannock, and South Staffordshire

New unitary authority
South-East Staffordshire

Former districts and boroughs
East Staffordshire, Lichfield, and Tamworth
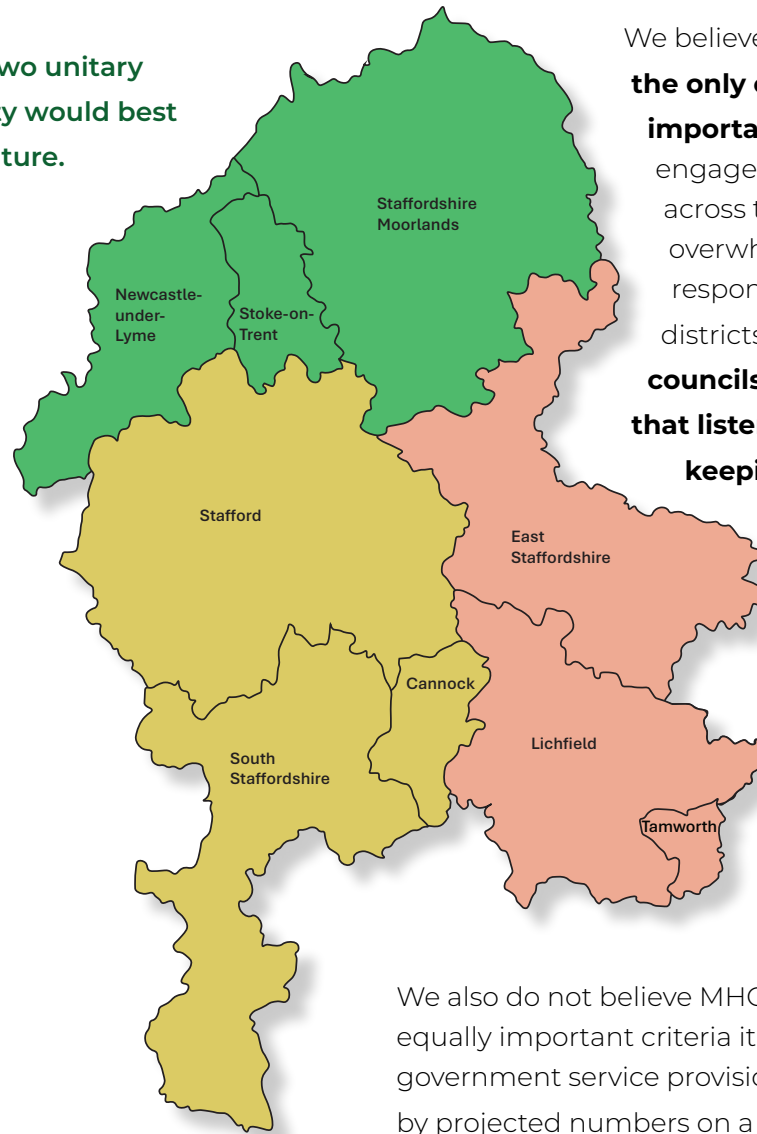
We believe our proposal for three unitary councils is **the best option for our county and the only option being submitted that meets all of Government's criteria and, most importantly, respects what matters to our residents.** Resident and stakeholder engagement has been key to developing this proposal. Over 16,700 people from right across the South of the county responded to our engagement survey. They expressed overwhelming support for the creation of two unitary councils in the South – 75% of respondents in our three council areas (66% of respondents across the six southern districts and boroughs). They also told us **the most important priorities for the new councils were that we keep services based on local needs, with local councillors that listen, and that we save money while keeping services running, alongside keeping what makes our areas special.**

> **We recognise that the two unitary council option this proposal is competing with, may on paper, deliver greater financial savings, however we do not believe they can meet the other criteria set out by government fully, as ours does.**

We also do not believe MHCLG is seeking 'the proposal that saves the most', at the expense of the other equally important criteria it has set. That would simply be a race to the bottom when it comes to local government service provision. The choice between two or three unitary authorities should not just be driven by projected numbers on a spreadsheet, **it should recognise the importance of keeping decision making close to communities and ensure we are putting in place structures that will empower communities, deliver growth and provide strong, ambitious place leadership.**

Local government must reflect its distinct local identities of place, and the people, businesses and communities it serves. We believe local leaders must be empowered to act as the leaders not only of their councils, but of their communities and of the wider system, bringing stakeholders and partners together to create the conditions for growth, and improve outcomes for residents. Any meaningful structure for the future of local government must support and empower this – and we believe three unitary councils will.

Changing organisational structures alone does not transform public services. Our proposal is for three new unitary councils capable of hitting the ground running, setting a clear vision for new, modern local authorities. We can build on a successful track record in working in partnership and establishing high-quality shared service arrangements. In our proposal, we include inspiring case studies of how we are already driving economic growth and transforming public services for the better in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The new authorities will be able to borrow technologies, structures and thinking from the private sector to meet the challenges

> **Our proposal demonstrates our clear commitment to establishing three new unitary councils that are ambitious and transformative with people-centred services and community empowerment at their core.**

of rising expectations and demand. Over time, the leaders of the new authorities will be able to consider the best mechanism for providing services, all the while ensuring they are deeply embedded in the communities they serve, focused on responding to the priorities of those communities and with a bold new approach to how services are provided.

A lot has been said in local government media about the 'right' size of population for unitary councils. Much of what has been written rests on the contention that bigger councils benefit from economies of scale and are more financially stable, efficient and effective. The competing proposals for two unitary councils (both North/South and East/West options) rely on the same contention.

Lichfield District

In October 2025, the District Councils' Network released new analysis of existing unitary councils, using publicly available data, to examine whether population size is linked to value for money and whether there is a sound basis for setting 500k as the guideline population level for new unitary councils.

> **Its analysis examined four aspects of council efficiency, effectiveness and value for money; expenditure per resident, financial sustainability, council tax and service delivery and clearly shows that the biggest unitary councils do not outperform their smaller counterparts.**
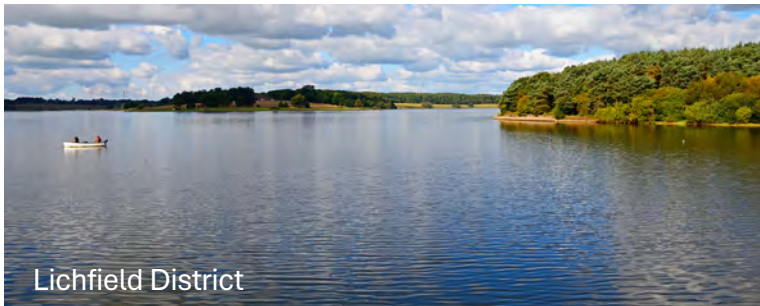
Lichfield District

The key findings were that:

» Larger councils appear to have been more likely to experience financial instability that is sufficiently serious to require Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).

» Larger councils have required more EFS relative to the size of their budgets than smaller councils. Analysis does not demonstrate that population size is the key driver of this outcome.

» Equally, there is no evidence that smaller councils are likely to be less financially stable than larger ones.

» Councils above a population threshold of more than 350k population typically spend more per resident than those below it.

» A wide range of performance measures (covering adult social care, administration and finance, planning, and waste) show no meaningful relationship between population size and performance.

» Projected outcomes are better at the median population of existing unitary councils (275k) than at 500k.

Tamworth

South Staffordshire

Our proposal fully endorses the DCN's analysis and assertion that **the best way for LGR to be a stimulus for real transformation of local public services is to ensure that it focusses on creating new councils that are genuinely local and close enough to communities to deliver the long-term economic and social benefits that flow from a focus on place and prevention.**

Ultimately, the success of local government reorganisation will be measured by better outcomes for our residents. Our new councils will set clear, ambitious goals for improving health, educational attainment, employment, housing, and wellbeing. We will publish transparent outcome frameworks, co-designed with communities, and report regularly on progress. The three unitary councils will be able to deliver at scale and pace, both meeting the government's desired outcomes and focusing on what matters most to residents.

Local government reorganisation is complex and not without risk, both in the initial implementation and later transformation periods, to realise the full benefits. Our proposal concludes detailing how we plan to approach implementation.

As you will see in the body of our proposal, we are cognisant of the need to treat the disaggregation and aggregation of services – especially people services – carefully. Our approach will be to protect the most vulnerable at every stage. We will prioritise the ongoing delivery of critical business as usual services while consolidating systems, assets and contracts to maximise benefits, minimise risk and support transformation. Our approach will ensure ongoing efficiency and effective service delivery while enabling a smooth transition.

South Staffordshire

Tamworth

Lichfield District

Five proposals are being submitted to government for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, and that must surely show how disruptive and challenging this process has been for local government in our area, in contrast to the normal strong cross-boundary and cross-tier working that we have enjoyed previously.

Our proposal covers the whole geography of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent while respecting functional economic areas, travel to work, cultural and social heritage. It is the only option that delivers against all the government criteria and, most importantly for us, it protects the places we serve and call home – retaining the 'local' in local government as no other option can.

We look forward to detailed discussions with ministers and civil servants on our ambitious and transformative proposal that delivers against all MHCLG's criteria.

Lichfield District

Tamworth

South Staffordshire

✅ The only option offering **population-balanced unitary councils** that better reflect Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's **diverse local identities**.

✅ The only option that **meets ALL of MHCLG's six criteria**.

✅ **The only option endorsed by residents**: We had **16,700 responses** to our LGR survey – with **75%** of respondents across our three council areas supporting two unitary councils in the South.

✅ The only option that **delivers residents' top priority for a new council**, keeping services that are based on local need - **73%** of respondents told us this.

✅ The only option able to **unlock additional savings in Adults and Children's Services** through localising services and reducing cost per capita by focusing on prevention and early help.

✅ The only option that **keeps decision making as close to communities as possible**, with a member/elector ratio that supports democratic representation.

✅ The only option that **embraces community power** and **people-centred services**.

✅ **Backed by** a number of **stakeholders and MPs**.

✅ The most effective option for **delivering economic growth and housing**.

✅ Supports the creation of a **Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Mayoral Strategic Authority**, with **three balanced unitary councils** that will be able to advocate for local need.

✅ Creating two unitary councils in the South of the county will deliver **£15.1 million net annual savings** and a payback period of under four years. A northern unitary is estimated to produce a further **£21.2 million net annual savings**.

Options appraisal summary

Driving **prosperity**,
preserving **identity**

The table below summarises our analysis on the main options for LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent against each of the MHCLG criteria for LGR, with 5 indicating the strongest alignment and 1 the weakest, further detail can be found in Appendix 1.

The appraisal was conducted using a structured scoring framework, with each option assessed against the six MHCLG criteria. Scoring was informed by quantitative analysis, qualitative evidence, and lessons learned from recent LGRs.

Our analysis shows that whilst both two and three unitary configurations would create financially stable councils, only the three unitary model meets all of central government's six criteria. The three unitary model outperforms all other options in every criterion.

MHCLG criteria	1 Unitary council	2 Unitary councils – North/South	2 Unitary councils – East/West	3 Unitary councils – North/SE/SW
Single tier of local government covering sensible economic and geographic areas.	3	3	2	5
Efficiency, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.	3	4	3	4
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.	2	3	2	4
Working together to understand local needs.	1	3	2	5
Supporting devolution arrangements.	1	3	3	5
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.	1	3	2	5
Total (out of 30)	**11**	**19**	**14**	**28**

South Staffordshire

Stakeholder and public engagement played a critical role in shaping the appraisal. Feedback from residents, businesses, and partners was gathered through surveys, workshops, and targeted consultations, and influenced the weighting and scoring of each option.

A brief summary of our appraisal of the other two main options being submitted to central government are presented below.

Two unitary councils – North/South

The two unitary councils (North/South) option divides the area into a northern and a much larger southern authority. This model achieves a total score of 19 out of 30. It performs better than a single unitary by reflecting the economic geography of the North, however the South as a whole is not a cohesive economic or social geography. The geographical size and significant population imbalance in the South will make it challenging to represent local identities, deliver tailored services, and ensure effective community engagement. The Southern unitary will cover an area similar in size to the proposed Eastern Unitary in the alternative two unitary option, with some towns and villages being more than 50 miles apart. It also risks creating a significant imbalance of influence in a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority, with the South likely to exert greater influence than the North due to its significantly larger scale and size.

Two unitary councils – East/West

The two unitary councils (East/West) option splits the area into eastern and western authorities. With a total score of 14 out of 30, this model lacks a clear rationale for dividing established economic and social geographies, especially between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent, that exist in Staffordshire without explanation. Crucially, there are huge differences between areas such as Staffordshire Moorlands which would be at one end of the eastern authority and Tamworth which would be at the other end. Grouping these distinct areas together would undermine effective place-based working and make it extremely difficult to deliver high-quality, locally responsive services. As reflected in the low scores for understanding local needs and neighbourhood empowerment, this model is ultimately unworkable and scores poorly on all criteria apart from efficiency, improved capacity and withstanding financial shocks.

Our approach

Driving **prosperity**,
preserving **identity**

Since February 2025, we have taken an evidence-based approach to assessing how the different options for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent deliver against the criteria set out by MHCLG. Stakeholder and public engagement has been key to informing our proposal, further highlighting the importance of local decision making, understanding of local issues, and supporting local businesses.

Interim proposal

Our interim proposal was submitted to the MHCLG on 21 March 2025 and set out our initial progress to that point. In our preliminary analysis, we identified the potential for a single unitary made up of 'up to 6' of the existing district and boroughs in the South of the county, alongside the strengths of two smaller unitary councils covering the same area – both of which merited further investigation.

The six southern participating councils to the interim plan were split over which was their preferred option, with some clearly and passionately advocating for smaller unitary authorities, closer to local populations, and more aligned to the average size of existing unitary councils in England, whilst others pointed to the then-stated MHCLG criteria that proposals be 'the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shock' (with a population size of 500,000 or more) – a criteria subsequently qualified as guidance, not a requirement.

Both the two and three-unitary configuration for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent were found to be financially viable and result in significant financial benefits and improved value for money when compared to the status quo. Whilst the financial case is undoubtedly important, our interim proposal also recognised the importance of wider economic and democratic criteria set out by government.

Tamworth

South Staffordshire

Since submitting our interim proposal

District and borough Councils in the South of the county have worked collaboratively and at considerable pace to develop this full proposal. We have reviewed all options, including considering changes to existing boundaries – while recognising that central government advocates using existing district and borough boundaries as the building blocks for any new unitary councils. Five cross-council workstreams were established involving all six district and boroughs in the South of the county, to help feed into the options appraisal and help develop the proposals:

- **Transformation and Service Design**
- **Communication and Engagement**
- **People and Workforce**
- **Finance**
- **Governance**

East Staffordshire

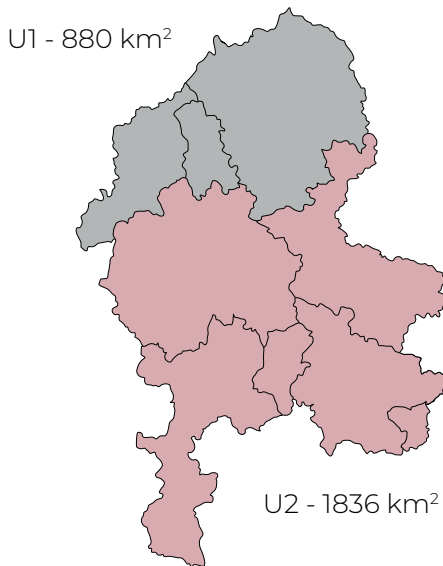Lichfield District

Stafford

Cannock

Each workstream was led by a chief executive from one of the six district or borough councils and had representatives from all six councils in attendance. The workstreams undertook specific analysis to support the development of this proposal, alongside identifying key interdependencies and looking ahead to implementation and transition. This has ensured that our proposal is based on a comprehensive analysis and robust peer assessment of the evidence available.

We shortlisted two options to undertake further work on:

Option A - Two unitary authorities – a Northern unitary (Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands) and a Southern unitary (Stafford, East Staffordshire, South Staffordshire, Cannock Chase, Lichfield and Tamworth).

Option B - Three unitary authorities – a Northern unitary (Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands), a South-West unitary (Stafford, South Staffordshire and Cannock Chase) and a South-East unitary (East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Tamworth).

Option A:
One Northern and one Southern and Mid unitary councils

U1 - 880 km^2

U2 - 1836 km^2

U1	U2
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough, Staffordshire Moorlands District and Stoke-on-Trent City	Cannock Chase District, South Staffordshire District and Stafford Borough East Staffordshire Borough, Lichfield District and Tamworth Borough

Option B:
One Northern and two Southern and Mid unitary councils

U1 - 880 km^2

U3 - 752 km^2

U2- 1084 km^2
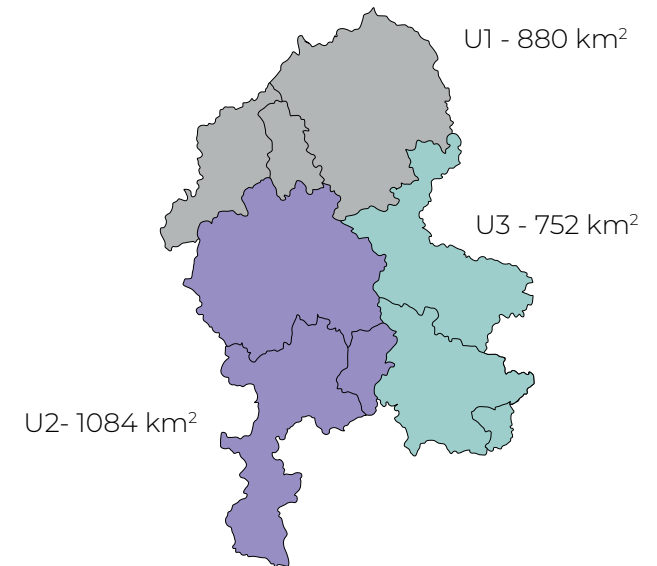
U1	U2	U3
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough, Staffordshire Moorlands District and Stoke-on-Trent City	Cannock Chase District, South Staffordshire District and Stafford Borough	East Staffordshire Borough, Lichfield District and Tamworth Borough

In developing this proposal, **we undertook comprehensive desktop research and data analysis.** This included the use of publicly available national and local datasets, alongside additional information and performance indicators supplied directly by the district and borough councils, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Key sources of data included local authority financial and service delivery metrics, workforce data, demographic and economic profiles, and lessons learned from recent LGRs elsewhere in England.

As set out above, while we have collaborated extensively across the South of the county, views differ on what model for the future of local government best serves Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. However, we all agree that creating financially sustainable unitary authorities is of fundamental importance to the future of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent as a whole. Indeed, it is only through creating sustainable, resilient and efficient authorities that we will be able to address the challenges faced by our residents and businesses. Our modelling shows that both two and three unitary models are financially viable and would create significant financial savings compared with the status quo. In reaching this point, the districts and boroughs in the South have worked from the same base data, which we have shared with the County Council and compared with theirs and data from Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

Our analysis since the interim plan has considered the importance of how we maintain strong local connections and accountability between local government and the communities we serve.

> When combining this with the need for the new unitarity councils to reflect coherent economic geographies, to maximise the opportunities for inward investment and growth, and work effectively with, and not have any one unitary dominate the emerging Strategic Authority. Our analysis clearly concludes that three unitary councils is the best and only option that does this and meets all six central government criteria.

Cannock
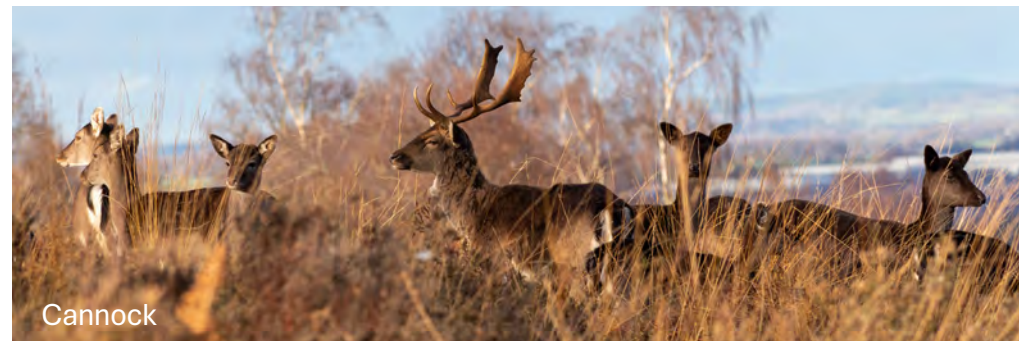
A **comprehensive public engagement campaign** was carried out to ensure residents, businesses, voluntary groups, public sector partners and stakeholders had the opportunity to feed in their views and opinions into both options under consideration. This included a public survey in the South of the county, stakeholder briefings and events, as well as sharing information via websites and social media. **Over 16,700 people in the South of the county responded to the public survey, one of the largest response rates to-date across the UK for a local government reorganisation survey.** All councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent also collaborated and held joint stakeholder interviews including with local MPs, the emergency services, education providers, the voluntary and community sector and local businesses. Public and stakeholder engagement has been central to shaping our approach. The feedback was actively used to refine our options, priorities, and implementation planning.

Throughout the development of this proposal, we have been committed to two-way collaboration and data sharing with Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council, focusing on a data-driven analysis of service delivery, financial resilience, and community needs. We have also engaged strategically via the Staffordshire Leaders Board and Staffordshire Chief Executive's Group throughout the development of this proposal. Public and stakeholder engagement has been central to shaping our approach. The feedback was actively used to refine our options, priorities, and implementation planning.

East Staffordshire

Lichfield District

Stafford

Cannock
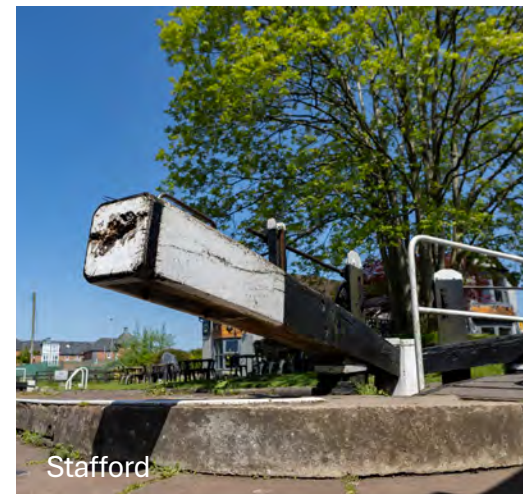
Our vision for LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Driving **prosperity,**
preserving **identity**

Our vision is to create three new, modern, ambitious unitary councils that are embedded in their communities, financially resilient, and support strong, local decision making. These councils will drive inclusive economic and housing growth, deliver high-quality and sustainable public services, and empower residents to shape the future of their local places.

We did not ask for local government reorganisation (LGR), but we recognise that if this is to happen, we must put forward the very best option for our residents, businesses and the future of local government. If change is inevitable, we must take this opportunity to be ambitious for our communities and commit to radically transforming public services, with our partners, for the better.

Our proposal for LGR has been informed by what matters most to our residents and businesses. From over 16,700 responses to our public survey on LGR in the South of the county, there was overwhelming support for the creation of two unitary councils in the South of the county (75% across our three council areas).

The top three priorities identified by respondents for the new councils were:

- **Keeping services based on local needs - 73%**
- **Local councillors that listen - 63%**
- **Saving money while keeping services running - 54%**

The three unitary model will allow the new councils to be embedded in the communities they serve whilst still delivering economies of scale and financial savings. **Each new council will cover a more balanced geographical area and population size than the two unitary model options,** while still significantly larger than the average for an English unitary authority at c. 275,000 population. We will champion 'community power' and 'double

devolution' to enable the right decisions to be made at the right level of geography, including towns and parishes and area committees. This will ensure we can enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunities for community empowerment.

South Staffordshire

Our work clearly shows that three unitary authorities:

1. Align the new local authority boundaries with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's distinct economic geographies, facilitating strategic planning and investment. Three unitary councils maximise economic growth, housing development and infrastructure improvements, with each council able to support both local and regional prosperity.

2. Are best placed to take advantage of new powers and responsibilities from devolution. Our three unitary model supports the creation of a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority. Our proposal will lead to a more balanced partnership within this Strategic Authority, with three unitary councils of comparable size and influence becoming constituent members. It would also remain balanced if government requires Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to engage constructively with

neighbouring areas such as Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire on an expanded geography.

3. Reflect Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's diverse local identities and economic geographies. Three unitary authorities maintain strong local connections and accountability, creating a system of local government that is responsive to the unique needs and characteristics of each area.

4. Emerge from and prioritise genuine and meaningful resident engagement and empowerment, ensuring that local communities have a strong voice in decision making.

5. Are efficient, resilient and able to withstand financial shocks. Although less than the government's 500,000 initial guideline, the three unitary model creates new unitary councils larger than the average size of English unitary councils today and achieves substantial savings through reducing duplication and maximising economies of scale.

6. Enable more holistic, locally tailored and needs-based service delivery by bringing lower- and upper-tier services together. This will improve outcomes by providing high-quality, innovative and sustainable public services that respond to local need, enable system-wide thinking and support the government's agenda for wider public service reform.

Our evidence and conclusions for each of MHCLG's criteria are set out in the sections that follow.

Criterion 1

Single tier of local government covering sensible economic and geographic areas

Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

The three-unitary model will create an effective single tier of local government across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent that recognises the importance of place and functional economic geographies. This will ensure responsive, strategic planning for growth, housing and infrastructure, whilst maintaining local identities and keeping decision making close to communities.

The government's guidance on local government reorganisation is clear: new structures must reflect "sensible economic and geographic areas" that enable effective, responsive, and sustainable local government. Our proposal for three unitary councils is rooted in economic and social geographies, travel-to-work patterns, and community identities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

This approach is not only consistent with national best practice and recent successful reorganisations, but also directly responds to the priorities expressed by our residents and businesses. By aligning council boundaries with real-world economic and social geographies, we ensure that local government remains relevant, accessible, and able to drive growth and opportunity at every level.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has a population of over c.1,14 million people; it includes a mix of urban centres and rural areas with strong local identities. It has a diverse and strategically-located economy in the heart of England, with more than 51,000 businesses, including tens of thousands of SMEs. It benefits from strong transport connectivity, and it contributes over £28.7 billion annually in Gross Value Added (GVA).

The three unitary model will deliver a set of unitary councils with a balanced population, able to make equal contributions to the future of our area. We recognise that government initially indicated a preferred population size of around 500,000 for new unitary councils. However, this has since been clarified as guidance, not a requirement.

In his 24 July 2025 follow-up letter, the Minister for Local Government stated:

> **"I know that proposals are being developed with a population size of more than 500,000, and for a population size of less than 500,000, and it is right that areas have the flexibility to put forward proposals that they believe are right for their area."**

Further government feedback in June 2025 reinforced this position, urging councils to focus on service efficiency, local identity and devolution potential, rather than strict thresholds.

In October 2025, the District Councils' Network released new analysis of existing unitary councils, using publicly available data, to examine whether population size is linked to value for money and whether there is a sound basis for setting 500,000 as the guideline population level for new unitary councils. This research shows:

- There is no meaningful relationship between population size and performance.
- Projected outcomes are better at the median population size of existing unitary councils (275,000) than at 500,000.
- Councils above a population threshold of more than 350,000 population typically spend more per resident than those below it.

- Larger councils appear to have been more likely to experience financial instability that is sufficiently serious to require Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).
- Larger councils have required more EFS relative to the size of their budgets than smaller councils. Analysis does not demonstrate that population size is the key driver of this outcome.
- Equally, there is no evidence that smaller councils are likely to be less financially stable than larger ones.

A three unitary model will produce a more balanced population spread across the new unitary authorities and allow the authorities to be able to better respond to local needs and priorities.

The below table looks at the current populations and projected populations of our proposal and the alternative two unitary models. This data has been updated since the Interim Plan to present the most up-to-date population estimates and projections.

Models	Current population (2024)	Projected population (2040)
Three unitary model	North – 494,803 South-East – 322,708 South-West – 360,067	North – 490,065 South-East – 353,648 South-West – 390,457
Two unitary model – North/South	North – 494,803 South – 682,775	North – 490,065 South – 744,105
Two unitary model – East/West	East – 689,784 West – 487,794	East – 714,975 West – 519,195

Source: Office for National Statistics Mid-Year Population Estimates 2024, 2022-Based Population Projections

Population in the North is projected to decrease, this is likely due to the 2022 population projections being based on the 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates.

As is illustrated, the future projected growth of the two unitary model (North/South option) will create an enormous unitary council of approaching 750,000 by 2040, making it one of the largest unitary councils in the country - over double the current average size of an English unitary of 275,000. Such scale risks creating councils that are too large and too remote with little shared identity, making it increasingly difficult to maintain meaningful connections with local communities, respond to local needs, and preserve distinct local identities.

The three unitary model is the only option that recognises and protects the diverse and distinct local identities that exist. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is not a homogeneous geography, economically or socially. The needs and opportunities that exist across the county vary significantly. **To illustrate this, on the next page is a short summary highlighting the uniqueness of each existing council area.** Further details on local context can be found in Appendix 2. The people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent care about where they live. They derive a sense of belonging and identity from their community and seek to nurture it. Local heritage and identity are shaped by history, culture, geography, and community life.

Tamworth

Lichfield District

South Staffordshire

Cannock

South-West Staffordshire

Stafford stands as the administrative and historic heart of Staffordshire, embodying a strong civic identity that reflects its role as the county town. This civic character is deeply embedded in the town's identity and continues to shape its contribution to the wider county. The town is home to **Stafford Castle**, a prominent landmark that anchors its historical narrative, alongside a vibrant arts scene supported by local theatres, galleries, and festivals. Events such as the **Stafford Shakespeare Festival** and **Stafford Music Festival** attract regional audiences and celebrate both traditional and contemporary creative expression.

Cannock is a district shaped by its deep-rooted industrial heritage. Historically central to Staffordshire's coal mining industry, Cannock's identity has been forged through generations of labour, resilience, and community solidarity. The legacy of mining continues to influence local values, with strong civic pride and a culture of mutual support evident across its towns and villages.

Today, Cannock is a town actively embracing regeneration while preserving its character. Investment in retail development, and green infrastructure is reshaping the town centre and surrounding areas. Host to **Cannock Chase**, a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, residents and visitors have access to one of the region's most treasured natural assets. From weekly walks to wildlife conservation, Cannock Chase is central to the district's evolving identity as a place where nature and heritage coexist.

South Staffordshire is a predominantly rural district bordering the western edge of the West Midlands conurbation, Shropshire, Worcestershire and neighbouring Staffordshire authorities. The district is made up of five localities, which forms the basis on engagement with partners and communities. Known as a "community of communities," South Staffordshire is defined by its rural lifestyle, green belt protection, and strong local governance. Village life is shaped by local events, parish councils, and strong neighbourly ties. From village fairs to heritage walks, the district's identity is deeply rooted in its rural charm and collective stewardship. South Staffordshire is a place where people choose to live. In 2024, 95% of residents said they would recommend South Staffordshire as a place to live. Its well-placed location, bordering Shropshire, Worcestershire, the city of Wolverhampton and the Black Country, provides access to an extensive and diverse labour market.

The **M6 motorway, A5 corridor,** and **West Coast Main Line** run through the heart of this geography, linking Stafford to Cannock and South Staffordshire, and providing direct access to major cities across the West Midlands and North-West. The **M54-M6 Link Road, A449,** and **M6 Toll** further reinforce connectivity, enabling the movement of people, goods, and services. These transport links support strategic employment sites such as **i54, West Midlands Interchange,** and **Stafford Station Gateway,** which serve as shared economic assets.

South-West Staffordshire

South-West Staffordshire is strongly aligned with the **West Midlands urban belt**, particularly **Birmingham** and **Wolverhampton**, through both commuting and infrastructure. Rail services from stations provide direct connections to **Birmingham New Street** and **Wolverhampton**, supporting daily commuting and business travel. Bus routes and strategic road networks such as the **A449**, **A5**, and **M6** further reinforce this alignment, linking Cannock and South Staffordshire to key West Midlands hubs.

Economically, the three districts complement each other through a blend of industrial heritage, strategic logistics, and rural enterprise. **Cannock** brings a legacy of coal mining and manufacturing, now transitioning into logistics and retail-led regeneration. **Stafford**, as the county town, anchors professional services, public administration, and higher education, with major regeneration projects like the **Stafford Station Gateway** unlocking new commercial and residential growth. **South Staffordshire**, meanwhile, is home to nationally

significant sites like **i54** and the **West Midlands Interchange**, the UK's largest rail-served logistics development, spanning **8 million sq ft**, creating **8,500 jobs**, and generating **£430 million locally** and **£900 million nationally.** South Staffordshire is home to major players like Jaguar Land Rover, Moog, and Eurofins. As Rachel Reeves said of JLR, "*It is one of the jewels in the crown of the British economy.*"

Census data shows strong commuting patterns between the area. The presence of shared education and skills infrastructure - such as **South Staffordshire College** - further reinforces this interdependence. Together, they form a functional economic geography that balances urban dynamism with rural resilience.

In contrast, the area has **limited interdependence with Stoke-on-Trent**, both economically and in terms of commuting flows. Data from the Economic Development Needs Assessment confirms that

commuting between South Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is significantly lower than with Wolverhampton, Walsall, and Birmingham. This reinforces the case for governance models that reflect the area's **functional ties to the West Midlands conurbation**, rather than grouping it with more distant and less connected regions.

South Staffordshire

North Staffordshire

Stoke-on-Trent, the largest urban centre in Staffordshire, is internationally recognised for its **ceramics heritage and creative industries**. Known as "The Potteries," the city has evolved into a hub for advanced manufacturing, digital enterprise, and cultural innovation. Its designation as a World Craft City in 2024 reflects this transformation. Cultural institutions such as the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery and Gladstone Pottery Museum preserve this legacy while supporting a growing visitor economy. The city's identity is also shaped by its people, communities known for their resilience, civic pride, and deep-rooted sense of place.

Newcastle-under-Lyme complements Stoke-on-Trent with its own **rich heritage and civic identity**. A historic market town with roots in the 12th century, it played a key role in **coal mining, ironworking, and brickmaking** during the Industrial Revolution. Today, it blends tradition with innovation, anchored by Keele University and its science and innovation park, which support

high-value employment and regional skills development. Its long-standing charter market remains a symbol of civic pride and continuity.

Staffordshire Moorlands offers a rural counterbalance to the urban centres of Staffordshire North. Its market towns Leek, Cheadle, and Biddulph are set within landscapes that stretch into the **Peak District National Park**. Leek, known as the "Queen of the Moorlands," reflects the district's regal and agricultural heritage. Natural assets such as ancient woodlands, rivers, and biodiversity-rich habitats contribute to the region's environmental resilience and quality of life.

North Staffordshire forms a geographically cohesive sub-region, defined by a continuous urban core surrounded by rural hinterlands and market towns. The area operates as a single travel-to-work and housing market, with shared infrastructure and

Stoke-on-Trent

public services reinforcing its spatial unity. This geography supports both local distinctiveness and regional collaboration.

The urban area of **Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme spans nearly 50 square miles, merging seamlessly across administrative boundaries**. This core is framed by 300 square miles of rural and semi-rural terrain, extending into the Peak District National Park. Staffordshire Moorlands plays a vital role in this geography, offering a rural lifestyle and environmental assets that enhance the region's overall balance and appeal.

North Staffordshire

Transport infrastructure is a key connector. The **M6 motorway provides North-South access, while the A500 and A50 corridors link Staffordshire North to Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, and the wider East Midlands**. These routes support strategic employment zones such as the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone. Additional routes like the A34, A53, and A527 reinforce mobility across the Moorlands and into neighbouring counties.

Rail connectivity further strengthens the region's strategic position. Stoke-on-Trent station, located on the West Coast Main Line, offers **direct services to London, Manchester, and Birmingham**. The Crewe–Derby line connects all three areas via East Midlands Railway, positioning Staffordshire North as a natural gateway between the West Midlands, North-West, and East Midlands. This geography supports integrated planning, shared service delivery, and collaborative economic development.

Stoke-on-Trent serves as the region's economic engine, **attracting over 29,000 daily workers**, many from neighbouring districts. Its economy is anchored by advanced manufacturing, digital enterprise, and creative industries, with **the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone** acting as a magnet for investment. Newcastle-under-Lyme complements this with a strong academic and innovation ecosystem, led by **Keele University** and its science and business park, which support high-value employment and regional skills development.

Staffordshire Moorlands adds a vital rural dimension, with agriculture, tourism, and small-scale manufacturing central to its identity. **Market towns like Leek and Cheadle** sustain vibrant high streets and local enterprise, while proximity to the Peak District supports a growing visitor economy. The district's high concentration of micro-businesses (92%) with fewer than 10 employees underscores its entrepreneurial character.

North Staffordshire is economically interlinked through strong commuting flows and shared infrastructure. Shared education and skills infrastructure, including Staffordshire University and Keele University, further reinforce the region's cohesion. Together, this area has a functional economic geography that balances urban innovation with rural enterprise.

Stoke-on-Trent

South-East Staffordshire

Tamworth, once the capital of **Mercia**, is steeped in Anglo-Saxon heritage. Its iconic motte-and-bailey castle and links to King Offa anchor the town's identity in early English history. Today, Tamworth blends historic charm with modern retail and leisure, creating a vibrant urban centre with a strong sense of independence. Though close to Birmingham, it maintains a distinct cultural and economic profile shaped by its compact footprint and dynamic local economy.

East Staffordshire offers a blend of urban and rural character. Burton upon Trent is internationally recognised for its **brewing heritage**, which continues to shape local pride and industry. Uttoxeter adds agricultural depth and tourism appeal, with its racecourse and countryside setting. The borough's communities spread across towns, villages, and rural areas are supported by strong local networks and traditions. Strategically located along the A38 and A50, East Staffordshire serves as a gateway to Derby, Nottingham, and the wider East Midlands.

Lichfield brings cultural depth and architectural grandeur. Known for its **three-spired medieval cathedral** and **as the birthplace of Samuel Johnson**, the city has long been a centre of literary and artistic heritage. Today, it continues to celebrate its history through festivals, museums, and a thriving arts scene. With excellent transport links and proximity to Birmingham, Lichfield serves as both a commuter hub and a cultural anchor for the region.

Tamworth's economy is driven by **retail and leisure, supported by a young and active workforce**. Its strong connectivity to Birmingham and North Warwickshire makes it a key contributor to the wider West Midlands labour market. **Regeneration projects, including the £21.65 million Future High Street Fund investment, are reshaping the town centre** and unlocking new commercial and residential opportunities.

East Staffordshire

Lichfield District

Tamworth

South-East Staffordshire

East Staffordshire adds industrial and logistics strength. Burton upon Trent's brewing heritage continues to shape the local economy, while its **location along the A38 supports advanced manufacturing and distribution**. The borough is home to major employers such as **JCB, whose World Headquarters at Rocester** anchors a globally-recognised engineering and manufacturing presence. Uttoxeter contributes agricultural depth and tourism appeal, supporting the visitor economy and local employment.

Lichfield offers a strong **professional and cultural economy**, anchored by its historic centre and skilled workforce. Its proximity to Birmingham and the M6 Toll supports high-value employment, while cultural assets like **Lichfield Cathedral and the National Memorial Arboretum** enhance the visitor economy. The district's educational attainment and growing presence of multi-academy trusts and further education partnerships position it as a hub for public services and creative industries.

Together, Tamworth, Lichfield, and East Staffordshire form a functional economic geography that balances urban dynamism with rural resilience, with shared infrastructure, overlapping housing markets, and complementary sectoral strengths.

These identities are not simply historical and cultural - they influence how residents relate to local government, what services they prioritise, and how they engage in civic life. **A key principle for LGR must be to respect and reflect these identities in decision making and service delivery**. Local government must have the capacity and flexibility to respond meaningfully to the uniqueness and needs of places. As such, we firmly believe the three unitary model is the only option that balances achieving financial stability with the imperative to recognise and nurture the distinctiveness of our communities.

As has been evidenced in this section, the three unitary model will **reflect functional economic geographies and drive economic growth**. There are clear differences in terms of functional economic geographies in terms of the way people live, work, and do business across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. By recognising the distinct economic clusters and their interdependencies, this model will drive targeted growth, support local priorities, and enable more effective, place-based decision making. The table which follows summarises the functional economic geography of each existing district, borough or city council.

Lichfield District

SUMMARY: Functional geographies

Area	Primary economic alignment	Interdependence with Stoke-on-Trent
Stoke-on-Trent	North Staffordshire	High
Newcastle-under-Lyme	North Staffordshire	High
Staffordshire Moorlands	North Staffordshire / Rural	Moderate
Stafford	West Midlands / Central Staffordshire	Low
Lichfield and Tamworth	Greater Birmingham	Low
Cannock Chase	Greater Birmingham	Low
South Staffordshire	Greater Birmingham	Low
East Staffordshire	East Midlands	Low

Headline travel-to-work data strongly supports the above. Using the 2011 Census data (due to the 2021 Census data being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic) clearly shows that there are very small (less than 1%) inflows or outflows of workers between North Staffordshire and Cannock Chase, Lichfield District, South Staffordshire or Tamworth. Conversely, 65% of working age residents (excluding those who live and work in the same district) in South Staffordshire and 45% in Lichfield work in the Greater Birmingham area.

There are strong workforce inflows and outflows (excluding those who live and work in the same district/city) between the districts in the North of the county and Stoke-on-Trent, for example:

- 41% of inflow workers to Stoke-on-Trent live in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

- 55% of outflow workers from Newcastle-under-Lyme work in Stoke-on-Trent.

- 51% of inflow workers to Staffordshire Moorlands live in Stoke-on-Trent.

- 42% of outflow workers from Staffordshire Moorlands work in Stoke-on-Trent.

In terms of travel-to-work data between the district and boroughs in the South, the connections aren't as strong, with the highest inflows and outflows of workers (excluding those who live and work in the same district) unsurprisingly being between district and boroughs that are adjacent to each other, for example:

- 10% of outflow workers from South Staffordshire work in Cannock Chase. Less than 1% of outflow workers from South Staffordshire work in East Staffordshire and Tamworth, and only 2% work in Lichfield.

- 15% of outflow workers from Tamworth work in Lichfield and 2% in East Staffordshire. In comparison, only 1% work in Stafford and Cannock Chase, and less than 1% in South Staffordshire.

- 14% of inflow workers to Stafford live in Cannock Chase. In comparison, less than 1% live in Tamworth.

- 19% of inflow workers to Tamworth live in Lichfield. In comparison, only 1% live in Stafford.

> **The above analysis shows that whilst there is evidence of a cohesive North Staffordshire economy, the economy in the South is more diverse with limited inflows and outflows of workers between some districts and boroughs, whereas strong inflows and outflows exist to the Greater Birmingham area and the East Midlands.**

In structuring local government around these economic geographies, the three unitary model will enable each council to focus on the unique strengths, challenges, and opportunities of its area. This approach not only supports more effective economic development and infrastructure planning but also ensures that local government remains responsive to the needs of residents and businesses, driving sustainable growth and prosperity across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, and supporting the delivery of the Strategic Authorities priorities.

South Staffordshire

Lichfield District

Cannock

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is undergoing a period of significant economic transformation. With major investments in logistics, advanced manufacturing, and the visitor economy, the area is poised to build on its strengths and unlock new opportunities for growth. Recent developments such as the £4 million Carlsberg Britvic depot at the West Midlands Interchange, the £582 million GVA potential of the Central Edge growth zone, and the £1.5 billion Fifty500 Midlands Growth Corridor highlight the scale of ambition across the region.

To fully realise this potential, the governance structures that support economic development must be fit for purpose. The current two-tier system has often led to fragmented decision making, duplication of services, and a lack of strategic coherence. Alternative models risk undermining local identity and effective governance. A single county-wide unitary would be too remote to understand or respond to local needs, while the two unitary models proposed would create significant imbalances in population and economic focus, making it harder to deliver tailored services or foster local pride. The three unitary model avoids these pitfalls by building on natural communities and economic links.

It is the most effective option for delivering economic growth across the county:

Stronger Place-Based Leadership – The three unitary model will be better positioned to understand and respond to the unique economic, social, and cultural characteristics of their areas. For example, the needs of a post-industrial city like Stoke-on-Trent differ significantly from those of rural South Staffordshire or the commuter towns of Lichfield and Tamworth. A three unitary model allows for more tailored strategies that reflect local priorities and opportunities. Key to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's strong track record in driving economic growth has been the district and borough councils building effective local relationships with existing and new businesses to maximise the potential for growth. The three unitary model builds on this foundation, keeping local government close to its communities and businesses to better understand the needs of businesses and the infrastructure required to deliver growth and prosperity – from SMEs to large multinationals.

South Staffordshire

Improved Economic Alignment – The three unitary model is the most effective model for improving economic alignment across the county. It aligns governance boundaries with distinct economic geographies:

- **North Staffordshire:** Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands – urban, manufacturing and logistics focused, a coherent economic zone with shared infrastructure, labour markets, and higher education institutions.

- **South-West Staffordshire:** Stafford, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire – a mixed economy with strong commuter links to Birmingham and Wolverhampton.

- **South-East Staffordshire:** Lichfield, Tamworth and East Staffordshire – retail, service and heritage -driven economies.

This alignment will allow each unitary council to tailor economic strategies to local strengths and challenges. The three unitary councils in our proposal will develop place-based investment plans that reflect local priorities, attract the right inward investment and support job creation. Each new council can build stronger partnerships with local employers, colleges and universities to support skills development, innovation hubs and sector-specific growth. They will be more capable of offering responsive infrastructure planning in line with local commuting patterns and growth corridors – avoiding a 'one-size-fits-all' approach risk of the two unitary proposals and reduce the risk of underinvestment in peripheral areas. Then, the three unitary model will complement the proposed Mayoral Strategic Authority, focused on delivery while the strategic authority coordinates major investment, transport and housing programmes.

Enhanced Accountability and Community Engagement – The three unitary model can maintain closer relationships with residents, businesses, and community organisations. This fosters greater democratic accountability as decision makers remain visible and accessible to the communities they serve. It enables more agile, responsive governance with councils able to quickly adapt to local needs and priorities. By keeping decision making local, this model avoids the risk of remoteness that larger, centralised authorities are criticised for. Residents are more likely to feel heard and empowered, and councils remain rooted in the unique identities and aspirations of their communities.

Capacity for Innovation and Collaboration - Smaller authorities can benefit from economies of scale through shared services and strategic partnerships while retaining the agility to innovate and respond to local need. The success of initiatives like Invest Staffordshire and the South Staffordshire Growth Agreement demonstrates that collaboration across boundaries is possible, driving investment, improving service delivery, and supporting economic growth without sacrificing local identity or responsiveness. By building on this, the three unitary model will enable councils to share expertise, pool resources, and develop joint solutions to complex challenges to respond to local need. This model not only fosters innovation and efficiency but also ensures that services remain tailored to the unique priorities of each community.
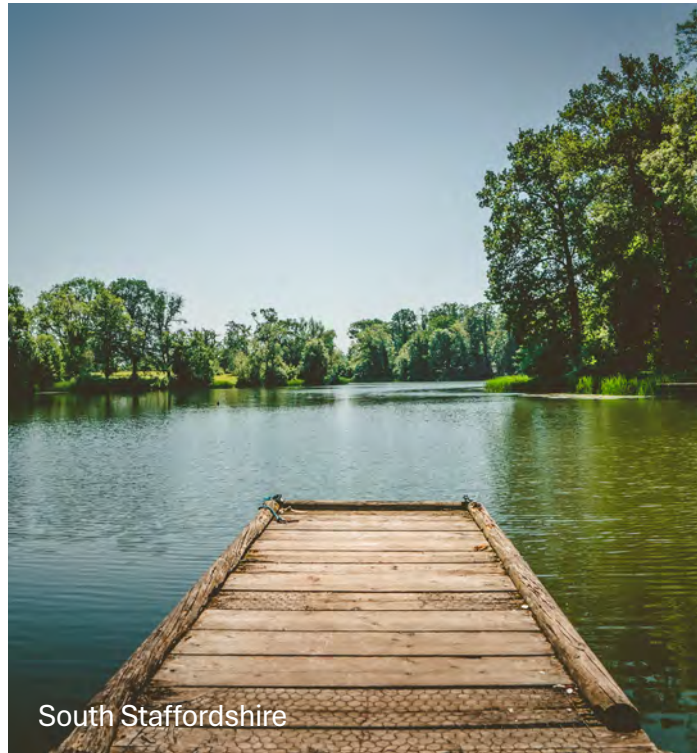
South Staffordshire
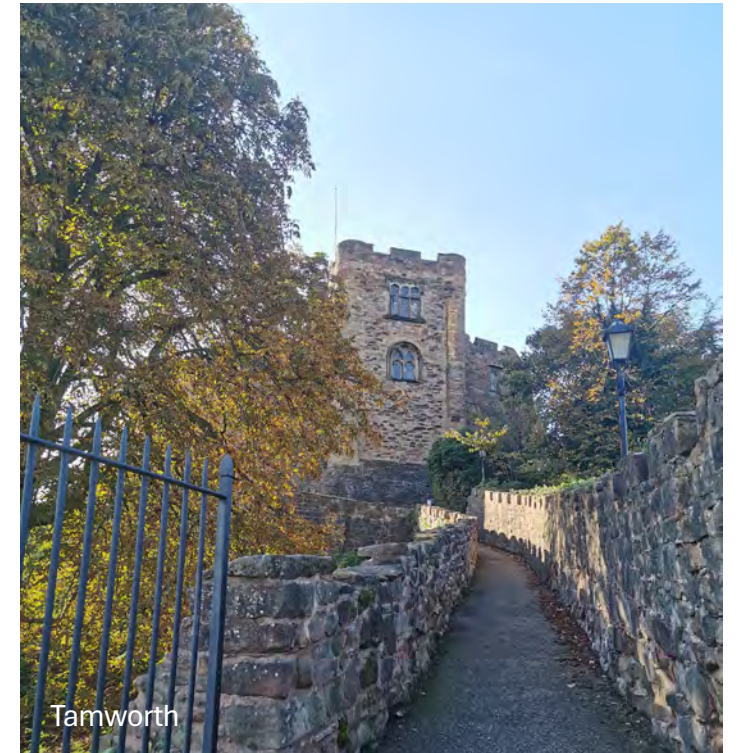
Tamworth

Case Study: Business engagement

Relationships with businesses at all scales has shown that they can be game changing in the opportunities for growth. South Staffordshire District Council's commitment to building relationships with new and existing businesses has brought huge benefits to the area. One of South Staffordshire District Council's businesses said:

"Our local authority understands not only our business but also the local community we operate in. This combination allows them to see the bigger picture and provide support that benefits both our growth and the wider area. It is important that any future council ensures this local, connected approach continues on a regular basis. Understanding the local area and the connections required to be successful for SMEs is essential for the future of the local communities and UK industry growth". Helen Hawkins, Snr Director Human Resources EMEA & India based at Four Ashes, South Staffordshire.

Businesses have highlighted that they benefit from South Staffordshire District Council understanding their needs, which, in turn, helps them access opportunities which would otherwise not have been possible. These benefits are most evident when relationships are strong and the organisation is small enough to remain nimble, dynamic, and responsive - able to deliver support at a scale where there is genuine understanding of business growth and capacity needs.

The relationships grown from partnership working at a local level have led to the Central Edge, see following case study. South Staffordshire District Council also won a iESE gold national award for its business partnership and ambassador scheme, working together to deliver improved local outcomes for businesses.

South Staffordshire

Case Study: i54 Central Edge

Within the existing local authority arrangements, there are demonstrated effective partnerships delivering growth opportunities - and these can be maintained to continue with a growing economic base.

The groundbreaking i54 - which is now home to Jaguar Land Rover, MOOG and others - was delivered by a bold and ambitious project which saw the county's biggest-ever civil engineering project witnessed to deliver a new junction off the M54.
The partnership between three local authorities saw collaboration between South Staffordshire District Council, Staffordshire County Council and the adjoining City of Wolverhampton Council.

This project was successfully delivered due to close relationships, local understanding and a deep collaborative approach.

This is now continuing with the emerging Central Edge, which is a project of significant scale accelerating the delivery of existing growth and delivering new opportunities for new economic growth, at pace, with new infrastructure and witnesses the continuation of the billion-pound investment approach made

possible by trusted inter-local authority relationships to deliver new sites, skills and growth.

South Staffordshire, as a small district, was able to move nimbly and at a rapid pace to orchestrate the union of the authorities in their shared ambitions.

South Staffordshire

South Staffordshire

The three unitary model will support the delivery of the government's ambitious housing targets. It is vital that planning authorities have a detailed understanding of their areas, including sensitivities, challenges and opportunities. This will be ever more critical to deliver the scale and pace of housing growth required.

Our work shows that the two unitary councils' options, covering larger geographical areas, risk not having the resources to truly understand their local areas and often resources can be focused on just a few geographical areas/projects. Strong local relationships with stakeholders are key to meeting the housing targets.

Our three unitary model will ensure proposed developments receive careful management and collaboration with stakeholders and communities. This can only be successfully done because our proposal for three unitary councils will remain close to communities and build effective, trusted, local relationships.

The government's ambition is to deliver 300,000 new homes per year nationally, with local plans across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent identifying the need for 5,987 new homes annually.

The three unitary model will enable each council to take a proactive, place-based approach to housing delivery, ensuring that local plans are robust, deliverable, and aligned with community need. By bringing planning, infrastructure, and housing functions together under one authority, the new councils will be able to:

- Accelerate decision making and reduce delays in the planning process.
- Work more closely with developers, housing associations, and Homes England to unlock stalled sites and deliver affordable homes.
- Align infrastructure investment with housing growth, ensuring that new developments are supported by the necessary roads, schools, and health facilities.
- Innovate in housing delivery, including modern methods of construction, community-led housing, and regeneration of brownfield land.

This approach will ensure that Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent work towards government housing targets, supporting economic growth and providing high-quality homes for residents.

Currently, Staffordshire County Council is responsible for strategic functional duties such as highways, drainage and archaeology across the whole county, which can mean that resources are spread thinly and are focused in certain areas of priority. Having two more manageable geographic areas in the South of the county, with each unitary authority responsible for the range of development management functions required to determine planning applications swiftly, will allow significantly improved outcomes for housing developments and will allow growth aspirations to be realised at pace.

Manageable geographies for unitary planning authorities - with staff who have a detailed spatial understanding of the areas, and their sensitivities, challenges and opportunities - will be critical to deliver the government's ambitious targets for house building at pace.

Larger geographies covering bigger spatial areas risk diluting attention on specific issues which are often critical to the smooth path for development proposals. The same is true for the broader spatial development plans which will be key for setting out the framework for the delivery of the government's house building targets; particularly in the areas where there is a need to significantly increase the targets and build at a pace not previously witnessed.

Three unitary councils will enable the careful management of development proposals with trusted relationships at a local scale, where the relevant key players at a local level are the pivotal points of whether or not a development proposal can get traction and be accepted by a community, in contrast to the community feeling it is being done to by a bigger entity.

We consider this can only be done effectively at a scale where trusted relationships can be effective and productive.

This will lead to better, swifter outcomes and will deliver the government's ambitions to build at scale and pace.

Stafford

South Staffordshire

Case Study: Transforming Planning

Lichfield District Council has transformed its planning service with the aim of working in collaboration with major developers to bring new, high-quality housing on-line as quickly as possible. Fast-track services have been introduced, alongside an interactive online planning enquiry tool and the implementation of an award-winning (Royal Town Planning Institute West Midlands Planning Excellence Award) district-wide Design Code which sets out clear standards for new developments. We recognised that gaining timely feedback from statutory consultees was a key blocker to progressing applications in a timely manner, in particular from the local highways authority. As such, the council brokered seconding a highways planner into the district council to allow them to develop a better understanding of local issues and to improve responsiveness to consultations.

Lichfield District

Criterion 2

Efficiency, capacity and withstanding financial shocks

▶▶ Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

The three unitary model will produce significant financial benefits, financial stability, organisational resilience and the capacity to withstand future shocks. Our financial modelling for two unitary councils in the South of the county is projected to generate recurring annual net savings totalling an estimated £15.1m by Year 3, with breakeven achieved in under four years. A Northern unitary is estimated to produce a further £21.2m of net annual savings.

Our proposal for three unitary councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is informed by robust, independently-validated financial modelling, scenario planning, and lessons learned from recent LGR programmes. We are confident the three new councils we propose will be able to deliver sustainable savings, invest in transformation, and maintain high-quality services for residents.

Our financial analysis and modelling are underpinned by conservative assumptions, rigorous scenario planning, collaboration across all councils and benchmarking against recent LGR elsewhere in England. We have modelled a range of scenarios (worst, mid, and best case) to ensure the new councils are resilient to economic fluctuations, inflationary pressures, and changes in demand programmes. We have stress tested our assumptions through scenario planning to ensure the new councils are financially resilient.

> **We understand the importance of establishing new unitary councils that are financially stable and provide value for money for our residents and businesses. Our analysis clearly shows that a three unitary model achieves this.**

Creating two unitary councils in the South of the county is projected to generate recurring annual savings totalling an estimated £25.6 million, which after disaggregation costs of £10.5m leaves a net saving of £15.1m by Year 3 based on the mid case financial model. This is equivalent to 1.9% of the combined net revenue budget (£1.4 billion).

Although not all these savings are directly aligned to integration, the levers we have assumed in preparing this proposal are mainly based on service delivery and integration and include:

- Optimising strong leadership and management structures.
- Consolidating corporate and support services
- Service contact consolidation.
- Smarter procurement and third party spend.
- Proportionate democratic and governance services.
- Digital transformation and improved IT systems.
- Asset and property optimisation.
- Community engagement and service contact optimisation.
- Consolidating fleets and optimising routes.

By embedding early intervention, prevention, and integrated service delivery into our operating models, the new councils will be able to manage demand more effectively, reduce long-term cost pressures, and improve outcomes for residents. This proactive approach is essential for building financial resilience and ensuring that resources are targeted where they have the greatest impact.

Breakeven is achieved in **3.8 years**, after which cumulative net savings exceed implementation costs. By Year 4, the reorganisation delivers a total net financial benefit of **£15.1 million**, supporting stronger long-term resilience.

A summary table of the projected savings for the two unitary councils in the South, by category is presented below:

A summary table of the projected savings for the northern unitary, by category and using a consistent approach and assumptions to the two southern unitary councils is presented below:

Projected annual savings by category				
£'million	Shadow Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Optimising leadership	-	648	1,297	1,297
Right sizing the organisation	-	1,945	4,538	6,483
Centralising corporate services	-	249	747	1,245
Service contract consolidation	-	4,713	8,378	10,473
Proportionate democratic services	-	686	858	858
Improved digital & IT systems	-	112	374	748
Asset & property optimisation	-	658	1,317	1,646
Customer engagement	-	150	299	449
Consolidating fleets & optimising routes	-	718	1,676	2,394
Total	**-**	**9,879**	**19,484**	**25,593**

Projected annual savings by category				
£'million	Shadow Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Optimising leadership	-	688	1,377	1,377
Right sizing the organisation	-	1,906	4,448	6,354
Centralising corporate services	-	254	763	1,271
Service contract consolidation	-	3,336	5,931	7,414
Proportionate democratic services	-	847	1,059	1,059
Improved digital & IT systems	-	79	265	530
Asset & property optimisation	-	466	932	1,165
Customer engagement	-	106	212	318
Consolidating fleets & optimising routes	-	508	1,186	1,695
Total	**-**	**8,192**	**16,172**	**21,181**

This ensures that all three new councils will be financially sustainable and able to invest in service transformation.

Annual savings build up – two unitary councils in the South (£'million)
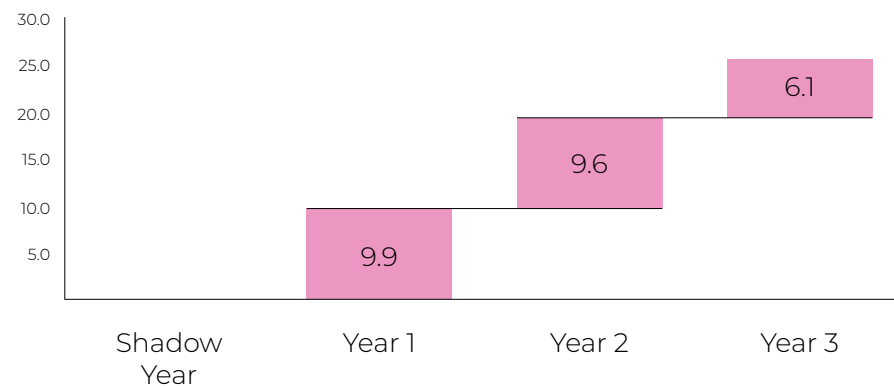
Annual savings build up – northern unitary (£'million)
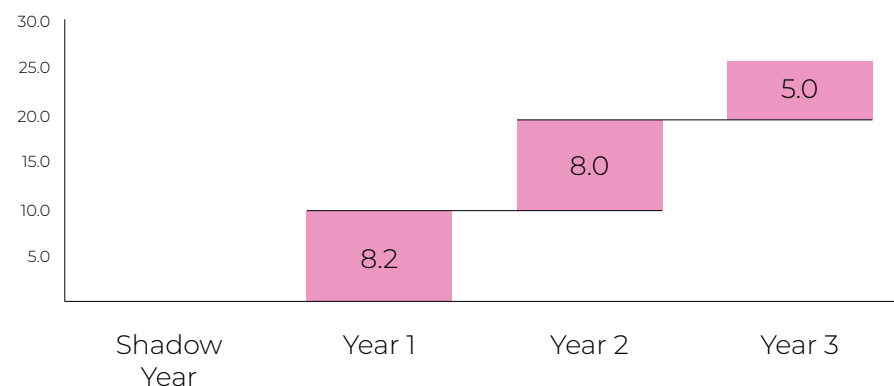
We recognise that two unitary models are projected to make larger savings than the three unitary model. However, our research shows that projected savings from previous LGR proposals across the country have not consistently been realised and often the projected savings from larger unitary councils come at the cost of service quality and democratic accountability.

In October 2025, the District Councils' Network released new analysis of existing unitary councils, using publicly available data, to examine whether population size is linked to value for money and whether there is a sound basis for setting 500,000 as the guideline population level for new unitary councils.

Its analysis examined four aspects of council efficiency, effectiveness and value for money; expenditure per resident, financial sustainability, council tax and service delivery - and clearly shows that the biggest unitary councils do not outperform their smaller counterparts. The key financial and efficiency findings were that:

- Larger councils appear to have been more likely to experience financial instability that is sufficiently serious to require Exceptional Financial Support (EFS).
- Larger councils have required more EFS relative to the size of their budgets than smaller councils. Analysis does not demonstrate that population size is the key driver of this outcome.
- Equally, there is no evidence that smaller councils are likely to be less financially stable than larger ones.
- Councils above a population threshold of more than 350,000 typically spend more per resident than those below it.

MHCLG Criteria	Data set/ evidence point	South-West unitary	South-East unitary
2.2 Efficiencies to improve council finances	Estimated annual savings through integration	£8.0 million	£7.1 million

While our proposal naturally focusses on the south of the county, we recognise that to be compliant with MHCLG criteria, it must cover the entire county area. We have sought to work with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and, while this was initially very productive with useful discussions on the aggregation / disaggregation of county services and governance proposals for the northern unitary, as Stoke-on-Trent are supporting the larger single unitary proposal for the south this has proved more challenging to achieve. What has been provided is aggregated information for their preferred two unitary option. This information, as well as being aggregated, does not include details on the assumptions they have used to calculate projected savings and transitional costs.

Therefore, our specialist advisors have provided further financial projections using a top-down approach for the northern area of the county. This modelling based on the mid case financial model identifies transition/implementation costs of £24.8m (£50.21 per capita) and a net saving of £21.2m (£42.81 per capita).

South Staffordshire

This submission uses a consistent approach to financial modelling and projections for both the southern and northern areas of Staffordshire. However, we have also been provided with financial information based on a three unitary option by North Staffordshire. This three unitary option also includes projections for transition costs and net savings, and the projections have been disaggregated over the three Councils.

We have compared the projections for transition costs £24.8m and net savings (£21.2m) prepared by our advisors to those provided by Northern Staffordshire, and there are significant variances. Therefore, an analysis of the two financial models has been undertaken. The key variances are explained below:

- Our advisors have included indexation for all the analysis, whereas it does not appear that Northern Staffordshire has taken this approach. This is one of the main reasons for the difference in figures.

- **Savings**
  - Our submission includes additional areas of saving including Contract Consolidation, Digital and IT, Customer Engagement and Fleet & Route Optimisation
  - There are differences in approach in calculating savings for property and service delivery and democratic services and how this saving is then applied to individual councils.

- **Ongoing costs**
  - Northern Staffordshire has not included any ongoing disaggregation costs

- **Transition costs**
  - Our submission includes costs for Workforce Development, Processes and Estate & Facilities, whereas Northern Staffordshire have a cost for establishing a new council.
  - Northern Staffordshire's contingency is 20% whereas our contingency is 10%.
  - Our submission has apportioned the transition costs across the three councils based on population, whereas Northern Staffordshire has applied it equally to all three councils.

Costs of LGR transition

We have explored the projected costs of implementing two unitary councils in the South of the county. The total estimated implementation cost for creating two unitary councils in the South of the county is £35.4 million over a period of six years, with the majority incurred from 2026/27 to 2030/31. These costs are essential to create two ambitious unitary councils in the South, focused on transforming public services for the better. As outlined earlier, our specialist advisors have projected the transition costs of implementing the northern unitary council to be £24.8m. The following categories of costs have been included in our calculations:

- **Workforce - exit**
- **Workforce - development**
- **Transition - team**
- **Transition – culture and communications**
- **Transition – processes**
- **Consolidation – systems**
- **Consolidation – estates and facilities**
- **Contingency**

The implementation costs for the two Southern unitary council and the Northern unitary council by category and using a consistent approach and assumptions is presented below:

	Two Southern Unitary Councils	Northern Unitary
	£m	**£m**
Workforce - exit	12.2	11.3
Consolidation systems	7.3	2.9
Transition – team	3.9	2.7
Consolidation – estates and facilities	3.5	2.0
Contingency	3.4	2.4
Transition – processes	2.1	1.5
Workforce - development	1.6	1.1
Transition – culture and communications	1.4	1.0
Total	**35.4**	**24.8**

In all LGR options currently being considered across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent there will be, to a lesser or greater extent, disaggregation or aggregation costs. It will be necessary for upper-tier functions, such as highways, social care and education, to be disaggregated or aggregated, alongside the aggregation of district and borough services. It is recognised that these costs will be higher in a three unitary model than a two unitary model.

However, as evidenced above, a three unitary model still produces significant savings, as well as meeting the other MHCLG criteria. Disaggregation costs for creating two unitary councils in the South of the county is estimated to produce additional annual costs of £10.5 million.

It is also important to note that the financial benefits from any council tax harmonisation are currently excluded from the annual savings included in this proposal.

The below bar charts compares one-off implementation costs against the estimated annual savings and estimated annual disaggregation costs for implementing two unitary councils in the South and a northern unitary.

One-off and annual costs vs annual savings (£'million) for the two unitary councils in the South
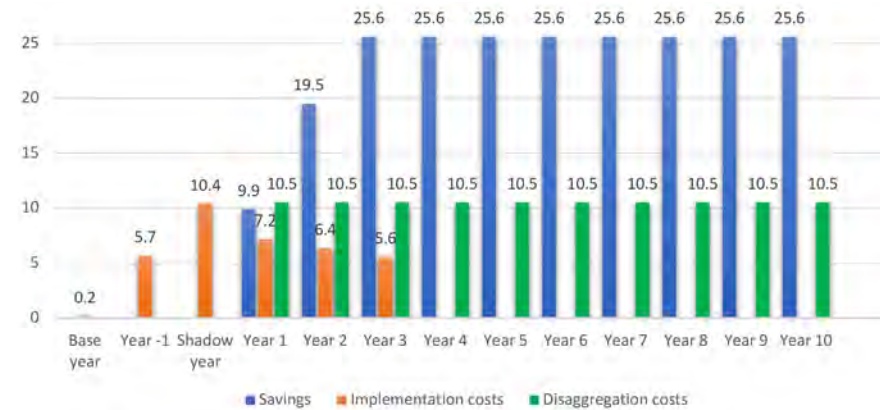
One-off and annual costs vs annual savings (£'million) for the northern unitary
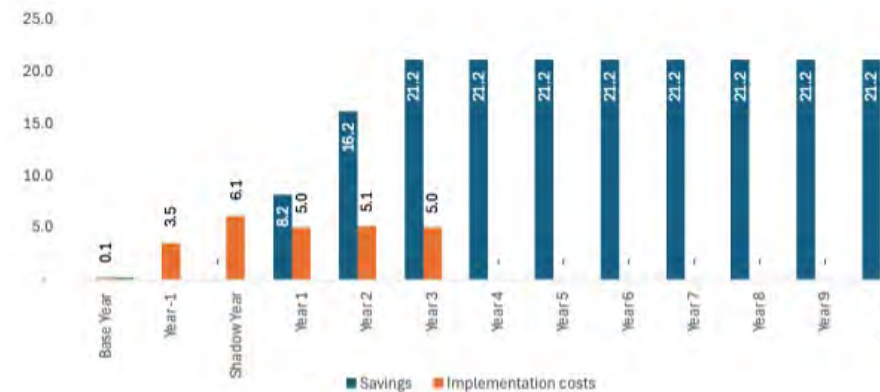
Cumulative net benefit line graphs shows the payback trajectory over time, highlighting the breakeven year for both two unitary councils in the south and a northern unitary are shown below.

Breakeven point - cumulative savings vs costs (£'million) for the two unitary councils in the South

Breakeven point - cumulative savings vs costs (£'million) for the northern unitary

Stafford

We recognise that all reorganisations carry risks, including inflation, demand growth, and the complexity of disaggregating services. Our implementation plan includes robust risk management, phased transition, and contingency buffers to ensure service continuity and protect vulnerable residents.

The robustness of estimates

Any form of financial projection is only as good as the assumptions used. The projections in this submission were undertaken and validated by external LGR specialist advisors, by the councils in the area and business cases prepared by previous LGR business cases. However, to provide additional assurance related to the robustness of estimates used in this submission, we have compared the financial projections to proposals being developed by other similar areas on a per capita basis - as shown in the table opposite.

Reorganisation option	Payback (in years)	Full year	5 Years		10 Years	
		Net savings	Net savings	One off	Net savings	One off
County - single	3	(£20.69)	(£78.63)	£36.77	(£182.08)	£36.77
County - two	10	(£5.70)	(£20.51)	£46.29	(£49.01)	£46.29
County - two	7	(£7.33)	(£27.84)	£37.01	(£64.48)	£37.01
County - single	1	(£32.86)	(£164.29)	£19.91	(£328.57)	£19.91
County - two	1	(£28.81)	(£144.05)	£27.84	(£288.11)	£27.84
Staffordshire - Two Unitary Proposal - North and South	2	(£43.40)	(£180.10)	£47.82	(£397.09)	£47.82
Staffordshire - Three Unitary Proposal	3	(£30.80)	(£120.20)	£51.16	(£274.22)	£51.16
Staffordshire - Stoke Proposal - North and South	1	(£13.18)	(£65.90)	£16.29	(£131.79)	£16.29
Staffordshire - County Proposal - East and West	4	(£18.34)	(£91.68)	£27.46	(£183.36)	£27.46

This comparison highlights that the projected net savings and one-off costs of implementing two unitary councils in the South are at the more prudent end of the spectrum compared to other submissions and this emphasises the robustness of the assumptions being used in financial modelling.

Whilst our analysis shows that the three unitary model is financially viable, it is important to recognise that all councils across the whole sector will face future financial challenges. This includes inflationary pressures and implications from the Fair Funding Review.

We have fully accounted for the costs of transition, including workforce changes, systems integration, and service disaggregation/aggregation. Our implementation plan includes a phased approach, robust risk register, and clear mitigation strategies to ensure service continuity and minimise disruption. Lessons learned from other LGR programmes have informed our approach to managing change and safeguarding critical services.

The new councils will inherit strong usable reserves and manageable debt levels, with financing ratios well within sector benchmarks. Each council will develop a robust Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), with contingency buffers and independent assurance, to ensure ongoing financial health and the ability to respond to unforeseen shocks.

Making savings from localising people services

A review of Staffordshire County Council's total expenditure on adult social care and children's services using data in LG Inform has identified further potential future savings opportunities in addition to the annual net savings from reorganisation. The review compared the cost per capita in 2024/25 for each of these two significant spend areas in Staffordshire to unitary authorities of similar population size (250k to 450k) to those proposed in this proposal.

Bringing cost in line with the per capita spend at these smaller unitary authorities, through more localised services and a prevention-based approach, has been identified as a key opportunity that could save significant sums annually:

2024/25 spend	Population 18+	Population 0 to 17	Adult Social Care total	Children's Social Care total
			£000	£000
Staffordshire	732,349	174,804	£509,440	£239,112

Similar sized unitary lowest cost per capita	£633.20	£1,003.20	£463,721	£175,363
Staffordshire cost per capita	£695.62	£1,367.89	-	-
Variance	(£62.43)	(£364.69)	(£45,719)	(£63,749)
	9%	27%	(£109,469)	

Similar sized unitary 20% improvement in cost per capita	£683.14	£1,294.95	£500,296	£226,362
Staffordshire cost per capita	£695.62	£1,367.89	-	-
Variance	(£12.49)	(£72.94)	(£9,144)	(£12,750)
	2%	5%	(£21,894)	

Achieving the lowest cost per capita in a new unitary council is viewed as very optimistic especially in the short term. However, just **assuming a more prudent 20% improvement in the cost per capita could save £22m annually across Staffordshire.**

It would be for the new councils to decide whether and how to reinvest this saving into services. However, at headline level the total savings opportunity between the net reorganisation savings and the additional £22m (apportioned across the three unitary councils) significantly increases the total of available savings while achieving lower cost and localised services in important areas of adult and children's services while having a positive impact on outcomes.

Independent advisors, SCIE (Social Care Institute of Excellence) and Peopletoo, have reviewed adult social care and children's services performance as part of other LGR proposals. Their findings also identify additional potential savings opportunities, which we believe are equally relevant to our proposal.

Council tax and business rates

The three unitary model will deliver a balanced council tax and business rate base. Relatively speaking, there is little difference between the current council tax rates which ensures minimal administrative and resident disruption in harmonising rates across the councils.

	Northern unitary	South-West unitary	South-East unitary
Council tax base (number of properties at band D equivalent)	138,005	118,323	115,946
Council tax harmonisation / difference in band D rates (average variance between districts within the proposed unitaries and their band D rate)	£70	£33	£21
Business rates tax base per capita	£313	£355	£438

Lichfield District

Long term approach to financial sustainability

For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.

There is a concern about the financial position of Stoke on Trent City Council, driven largely by the need for EFS which in 2025/26 is **£16.8m**. Stoke on Trent City Council's budget position is entirely due to the level of presenting acute need in children's social care services, without a change in delivery model, these pressures will continue to grow. **The three unitary council model is built to focus on prevention and localising key people services to reduce per capita costs. It is well known that for every £1 spent on prevention £3.17 is saved on adult social care. Research also highlights that localising people services can lead to a 20% reduction in per capita costs.**

Current Financial Position

We have mapped the funding gaps to illustrate the future financial outlook for each authority. This serves as a crucial indicator of the current councils' financial resilience which will be inherited by new councils and the impact this has on financial resilience of new organisations. These figures give an indication of the financial position as each authority makes different assumptions in their projections for example on future grants, inflation and demand impacts:

Proposed Unitary Council	Existing Council		2028/29	
			This Proposal	Stoke Led Proposal
		£m	£m	
North Staffordshire	Stoke	Not included	12.3	
North Staffordshire	Staffordshire Moorlands		(0.2)	
North Staffordshire	Newcastle		1.2	
South East Staffordshire	East Staffordshire	1.4	1.4	
South East Staffordshire	Lichfield	2.8	3.5	
South East Staffordshire	Tamworth	5.3	5.0	
South West Staffordshire	Stafford	2.0	2.9	
South West Staffordshire	Cannock Chase	2.8	3.1	
South West Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	2.4	2.4	
	Sub Total	**16.7**	**31.6**	
	Staffordshire	24.2	24.2	
	County Total	**40.9**	**55.8**	

Sources: This proposal Local Authority published Medium Term Financial Plans adjusted for the projected impacts of fair funding 2.0 and the Stoke led proposal using unadjusted projections.

The proposal led by Stoke-on-Trent City Council has analysed projected funding gaps for 2028/29. The allocations to new configurations of authority based on the population of respective areas would be North Staffordshire **£18m**, South East Staffordshire **£18m** and South West Staffordshire **£18m**.

Funding Reforms

Several reforms to the current system of funding are planned to be implemented by the Government from 2026/27. These include revisions to:

· Relative Needs Formulae
· Council Tax equalisation
· Rationalising the number of grants allocated outside of the Settlement Funding Assessment
· Resetting Business Rates

The impact of these reforms has not been factored into assumptions or analysis in this case due to the uncertainty on final decisions, impacts and transitionary arrangements.

Reserve Levels

In this proposal, authorities have projected their total general fund earmarked and general reserves for 2027/28 whereas the proposal led by Stoke has used a total general fund Unringfenced reserves level of **£641m**:

Proposed Unitary Council	Existing Council	This Proposal	Stoke Led Proposal
		£m	£m
North Staffordshire	Stoke	Not included	
North Staffordshire	Staffordshire Moorlands		
North Staffordshire	Newcastle		
South East Staffordshire	East Staffordshire	20.4	
South East Staffordshire	Lichfield	16.8	
South East Staffordshire	Tamworth	1.5	641.0
South West Staffordshire	Stafford	23.3	
South West Staffordshire	Cannock Chase	13.1	
South West Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	3.3	
	Sub Total	**78.4**	
	Staffordshire	217.8	
	County Total	**296.2**	**641.0**

Sources: This proposal uses projected total reserves for 2027/28 and the Stoke led proposal uses a level of reserves where the source has not been identified.

One option to address resilience could be to pool these reserves and allocate them based on population, if this option were to be selected and using the Stoke led proposal reserve projection, the allocations would be:

New Authority	Total Reserves £m
Northern	269
South East	176
South West	196
Total	**641**

However, to finalise the allocation, further discussions will be needed to decide the basis for the allocation of county reserves across the new Councils after reorganisation.

It will be the decision of each unitary to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation.

Due to the ring fence on balances and available earmarked reserves for the Housing Revenue Account, these have not been factored into any financial analysis in this case.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

At the end of 2024/25, Staffordshire County Council reported a deficit related to Dedicated Schools Grant of **£55m** and Stoke on Trent reported a deficit of **£23m**. Under LGR, shares of this deficit would be apportioned on an appropriate basis e.g. school pupil numbers to the three unitary councils.

Deficits on the DSG is a national problem affecting county and unitary authorities. At present, these are being managed through a statutory override which enables a technical adjustment in the statement of accounts to hold these deficits without recognising the impact against General Fund resources.

A consultation is expected by the Government in 2026/27 on reforms to SEND, the root causes of deficits and to invite proposals for a resolution. Members of the shadow authorities will need to carefully consider proposed reforms considering their local circumstances.

Debt Levels

There are different ways to assess the level of debt that new authorities will inherit such as the General Fund Capital Financing Requirement or the level of borrowing outstanding from Balance Sheets. The information used in the two proposals is shown below:

Proposed Unitary Council	Existing Council	This Proposal Debt Financing			Debt Levels		
		Financing Cost	Net Revenue	Financing Ratio	This Proposal	Stoke Led Proposal	
		£000	£000	%	£m	£m	%
North Staffordshire	Stoke	Not included	Not included	Not included	Not included	650.1	88
North Staffordshire	Staffordshire Moorlands					14.0	33
North Staffordshire	Newcastle					23.8	60
South East Staffordshire	East Staffordshire	(184)	17,431	(1.1%)	3.8	12.6	58
South East Staffordshire	Lichfield	(1,083)	15,755	(6.9%)	4.7	1.7	55
South East Staffordshire	Tamworth	(684)	12,374	(5.5%)	0.0	7.0	80
South West Staffordshire	Stafford	0	0	0.0%	0.0	3.4	41
South West Staffordshire	Cannock Chase	0	0	0.0%	0.0	7.6	89
South West Staffordshire	South Staffordshire	(13)	15,218	(0.1%)	15.0	42.0	36
	Sub Total	**(1,964)**	**60,778**	**(3.2%)**	**23.5**	**762.3**	
	Staffordshire	24,220	738,908	3.3%	358.5	569.1	59
	County Total	**22,256**	**799,686**	**2.8%**	**381.9**	**1,331.4**	
	South West	7,413	241,783	3.1%	124.9		
	South East	4,647	246,849	1.9%	106.1		

Sources: This proposal uses quarter 1 2025/26 information. The Stoke led proposal uses the estimated general fund capital financing requirement as 31 March 2025 with the % being the capital financing requirement funded by external borrowing.

Tamworth

- The proposal led by Stoke-on-Trent City Council has analysed outstanding debt and balance sheets and identified the general fund capital financing requirement at 31 March 2025 as **£1,331m**. Stoke on Trent City Council accounts for £650m (49%) and Staffordshire County Council accounts for £569m (43%). In contrast, the district councils have relatively low levels of borrowing.
- Across Staffordshire Councils, the total borrowing from local authority published accounts at 31 March 2025 was **£1,440m**. It is important to note that a large proportion of the debt from borrowing for Tamworth, Cannock Chase and Stoke on Trent is related to borrowing for the Housing Revenue Account.

The general fund capital financing requirement used in the Stoke led proposal can be apportioned in different ways to the new authorities. Two alternatives have been considered:

- **Option 1** – the existing capital financing requirement is transferred to the new authority and the County Council element is allocated based on population.
- **Option 2** - the existing capital financing requirement is pooled and is allocated based on population.

New Authority	Option 1 £m	Option 2 £m
Northern	927	559
South East	177	365
South West	227	407
Total	**1,331**	**1,331**

Lichfield District

As part of medium-term financial planning, the Shadow Authorities will need to carefully consider priorities for their respective capital programmes for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account and how to finance these by considering existing debt they inherited under LGR and impacts on revenue budgets from debt due to historic decisions.

Addressing Financial Sustainability

All three proposed unitary councils must be established on a sustainable financial footing especially the Northern Unitary given the financial challenges currently being experienced by Stoke on Trent City Council. There are proposed changes to local government finance that should address some of the underlying issues together with benefits from LGR:

- **A Prevention based approach** - The three unitary council model is built to focus on prevention. It is well known that for every £1 spent on prevention £3.17 is saved on adult social care.
- **Local Government Finance Reform** – the fair Funding review 2.0, Council Tax equalisation and Business Rates Reset will allocate funding based on the most up to date data together with new formulae that are intended to reflect up to date cost drivers.
- **Council Harmonisation** – the ability to harmonise Council Tax levels will mean Unitary Councils can decide on the approach based on their local circumstances.
- **Wider Taxbase and Spending Power** – the new Unitary Councils will have a wider tax base and spending power to manage risk and improve resilience.
- **LGR Savings** – the ongoing savings identified in our proposal can be used to improve financial sustainability.
- **Reserves and Debt** – a basis of allocation to each Unitary Council could be used to assist with the financial sustainability of all three new Unitary Councils.

> **In summary, the three unitary model offers the right balance of efficiency, capacity, and resilience to withstand financial and operational shocks.**

It is fully aligned with the government's criteria for LGR, ensuring value for money, organisational sustainability, and the ability to deliver high-quality services for years to come.

It presents a financially sustainable and operationally efficient solution to the challenges facing local government in the county. With a payback period of under 4 years for each new council in the south, it offers a powerful value for money case under Government Criterion 2 and aligns with national expectations for resilient and efficient public service delivery.

Further work will be required as part of the implementation of new unitary councils to address

the costs of disaggregating services currently provided by Staffordshire County Council and aggregating services currently provided by district and borough councils. This includes allocating debt profiles, assets, reserves, cash, liabilities, dealing with Housing Revenue Accounts, and Wholly Owned Companies.

Specifically, we recognise the challenge that all councils will face in terms of the pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant and high needs funding, currently held at County Council level. The Local Government Association (LGA) / County Councils Network (CCN) report, "Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England" found that, despite bespoke financial support for some councils via the Department for Education's 'safety valve' programme cumulative deficits are projected to rise to £5 billion by 2026. The Public Accounts Committee concluded that "local authorities bear an unsustainable financial burden." This is a national issue where reform is required.

Beyond core savings and additional potential adults social care and children's services savings that we have identified, the three unitary model forms a strong foundation for long-term financial and service resilience. The creation of three unitary councils enables focused local leadership, supports economic growth, and is underpinned by people-centred service delivery. Crucially, it enhances the ability to invest in prevention and early intervention, while establishing stronger collaboration with partners such as the NHS, police, charities, and community groups, ensuring better outcomes for the people of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and supporting the broader public sector reform agenda.

Ultimately, the success of this reorganisation will be measured not just in financial terms, but in the ability to deliver better outcomes for residents. The three unitary model enables targeted investment in prevention, early intervention, and service transformation.

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

Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

Key to our vision for LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is our commitment to create modern, ambitious councils committed to radically transforming public services for the better. We believe the three unitary model will be able to better understand local needs, be more responsive, able to transform and deliver quicker.

Any new local government structures must be built on a vision of delivering high-quality, responsive and accountable services that meet the needs of local people and communities.

> **We firmly believe the three unitary model is the only model that will allow local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to remain responsive and relevant to its local communities.**

We believe it is also the only model that will work proactively with partners, including the NHS, voluntary and community sector, and other public agencies, to identify and address local needs at the earliest opportunity, reducing demand for high-cost services and improving long-term outcomes for residents. Smaller, place-based councils can identify issues

sooner, coordinate support locally, and reduce demand on high-cost services through early intervention and prevention. This means services will be tailored, efficient, and more sustainable than options that create larger, more remote unitary councils. This approach not only improves outcomes for residents but also delivers long-term savings by reducing reliance on crisis services. In contrast, larger, more remote councils often struggle to maintain the local knowledge and trusted relationships needed for effective early intervention and partnership working.

In developing this proposal, **we have established a set of service design principles** to guide the implementation and transformation of the new unitary councils. These set out our commitment to take the opportunity to not just 'merge and aggregate' but to 'transform and celebrate our communities' to:

- Deliver high quality services, with a mixed economy delivery model, deciding where and how services are best delivered.

- Act in the best interests of the place, integrating across sectors to secure the best outcomes.

- Secure financial sustainability.

- Prioritise innovation and continuous improvement – using digital as an enabler.

- Act early and prevent demand, driven by insight, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

- Consider the impact of our actions on environmental sustainability.

- Enable our residents to build resilience and support one another, in thriving communities.

It is clear from our work that these principles and the government's criteria are best met by a three unitary council model in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

An analysis of options was started during the development of our interim plan, and completed with external LGR specialist advisors:

Option 1 is a single unitary council which we consider to be too big to drive the improvement in services that Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent require, including in key statutory services such as adult social care and children's services.

Option 2 is two unitary councils with a North and South split, with Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme being joined to Stoke-on-Trent, and Lichfield, Cannock Chase, Stafford, South Staffordshire, Tamworth and East Staffordshire being combined into a second unitary council. This proposal created significantly imbalanced unitary councils, does not recognise all of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's economic geographies and creates one dominant authority which would undermine any option for a Strategic Authority.

Option 3 is two unitary councils with an East and West split, with Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stafford, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire joined in one, and Lichfield, Tamworth, East Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands combined in the second unitary. As with option 2, this proposal creates significantly imbalanced unitary councils, does not recognise Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's economic geographies and creates one dominant authority which would undermine any option for a Strategic Authority.

Option 4 is three unitary councils with Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme being joined to Stoke-on-Trent in one unitary, Stafford, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire combined in a second and Lichfield, Tamworth and East Staffordshire in a third. This option meets the design principles we set, and the government's criteria for LGR.

The proposed three unitary councils require no boundary modifications and have starting populations well in excess of the current average populations served by unitary councils in England - 275,000.

Mixed economy delivery model

As introduced in our interim plan proposal, we recognise that to provide local people with the modern, quality services they expect, there will be a need to do things differently and change the way the new councils function, how they are structured - including the use of alternative models - and how they interact with communities. This will require an organisational change programme to create three new unitary authorities that are:

- **Resident centric –** capable of dealing with needs as well as wants, providing consistently outstanding services to drive improved satisfaction and trust. Residents should be able to access more services 24/7 and self-service for simple transactions will become the norm. The new authorities should embrace new technologies, common place in the private sector, as early adopters of digital, robotic and AI capabilities. Where possible, a single view of the resident should be developed, so staff across the authorities have the right information to resolve requests for service within agreed performance timeframes. Resident interactions should be efficient, straightforward and sensible. Resident journeys, from initial enquiry through to final

response, should be mapped to ensure resources are effectively deployed, and residents receive a prompt and accurate resolution.

- **Commercially minded** – with structures, processes and working arrangements reset to match those of commercially-minded, business-focused organisations. A sustainable balance of resident centricity, financial sustainability, value delivery and accountability should be created. Data driven – where solving problems and making strategic decisions based on data analysis and interpretation is the norm. Data should be used and examined more effectively to better understand the wellbeing of residents. This would aid in making informed decisions, identifying priorities for the new councils and planning, structuring and managing services to serve residents.

- **Performance driven** – committed to and accountable for a well-articulated common purpose and a clear set of performance goals. Performance goals and outcomes should be published openly, so the new authorities are accountable to residents for the services provided and outcomes enabled.

Act in the best interests of place, integrating across sectors to secure the best outcomes

We firmly believe it is virtually impossible to be able to do this across larger geographical areas. As evidenced earlier in our proposal Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is not made up of homogenous communities.

The three unitary model is the best option to allow local government to continue to have a strong connection to place and communities.

This in turn will allow us to better integrate with other public sector partners and act as an advocate for our places.

Enable our residents to build resilience and support one another, in thriving communities

Our proposal is built on the commitment to embed community power to all we do. We have seen right across the South of the county the huge impact communities can have by coming together to support each other and champion what matters to them. A three unitary option will allow us to understand our communities and place, which is key to councils being a champion and enable community power.

Case study: Local authority trading company success

Lichfield West Midlands Traded Services Ltd (LWM) is the wholly owned trading company of Lichfield District Council. Since beginning operations in 2022/23, LWM has evolved into a dynamic service provider with a growing portfolio and a clear mission: to deliver high-quality services to residents while reinvesting surpluses into the local community.

As well as transforming existing local government services, LWM also develops new income streams, including talent acquisition, a biodiversity brokerage service and a planning consultancy. Since its inception, LWM has created £735,000 of net benefit to Lichfield District Council, key to enabling the council to maintain a balanced budget and investing in what matters most to our residents. In 2024/25 LWM recorded a turnover of £6.9m and as well as returning a dividend to the district council made a £10,000 donation to local charity, We Love Lichfield.

Lichfield District

Lichfield District

Lichfield District

Lichfield District

Case study: Integrating sectors for community Wellbeing

Green Health Tamworth is a partnership initiative led by Tamworth Borough Council, working closely with local GPs, social prescribers, voluntary groups, and community volunteers. The project uses community gardening, green prescribing, and nature-based activities to improve health, tackle social isolation, and build resilience.

Residents are referred by GPs and social prescribers to join gardening groups, nature walks, and outdoor volunteering in Tamworth's parks and allotments. The council coordinates with health professionals, local charities, and volunteers to ensure activities are accessible, inclusive, and tailored to local needs. Training is provided for community volunteers, and the programme is co-designed with participants to reflect Tamworth's unique character and challenges.

Outcomes:

- Improved mental and physical health for participants, with many reporting reduced GP appointments and increased wellbeing.

- Dozens of local volunteers trained, building community capacity and social capital.

- Stronger partnerships between the council, NHS, voluntary sector, and residents, demonstrating the power of integrated, place-based working.

- The success of Green Health Tamworth is rooted in local knowledge, trusted relationships, and the ability to act nimbly in response to community priorities.

Tamworth

Tamworth

Case study: Partnership working with National Highways

The A38 is a vital strategic route running through East Staffordshire, connecting Burton upon Trent and surrounding communities to the wider national transport network. Recognising its importance for freight, commuting, and economic growth, East Staffordshire Borough Council partnered with National Highways to deliver a coordinated programme of maintenance, environmental improvement, and public safety enhancements.

The partnership was built around a shared commitment to:

- Minimise disruption by aligning litter clearance and verge maintenance with scheduled overnight road closures.

- Maximise efficiency by combining operational resources during National Highways' resurfacing and lighting upgrades.

- Enhance environmental outcomes through large-scale litter removal and verge restoration.

This approach avoided the need for separate closures, reduced costs and improved outcomes. This project exemplifies how local and national agencies can work together to deliver smarter, safer, and more sustainable infrastructure outcomes.

East Staffordshire

East Staffordshire

East Staffordshire

Secure financial sustainability

Our services must be financially sustainable. This will be particularly challenging in regard to children's services, SEND and adult social care. However, we firmly believe that by viewing the challenges of these services through the lens of our design principles, and over time challenging the current commissioned out model that dictates their provision, there are real opportunities to make them financially sustainable and more importantly improve outcomes for residents, as we set out later in this section.

Prioritise innovation and continuous improvement – using digital as an enabler

This will be hard-wired into the culture of the new unitary councils. Too often 'transformation' is seen as someone else's job, or something that is done to teams. As districts and boroughs, we have multiple examples of how being early adopters of new technologies have improved services to residents and reduced overall costs of provision. Embracing innovation and seeking continuous improvement will be a core requirement for every member of staff.

South Staffordshire

Tamworth

Lichfield District

CRITERION 3 – UNITARY STRUCTURES MUST PRIORITISE THE DELIVERY OF HIGH QUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC SERVICES TO CITIZENS

80

Case study: Resident centric

Prior to April 2023, Disabled Facility Grants were outsourced, and due to the poor performance, Stafford Borough Council (host authority) and South Staffordshire Council entered an in-house shared service with a focus on reducing waiting times for referrals and maximising spend to support our vulnerable communities to adapt their homes to meet their individual needs and carers. Creating a shared service across the two authorities provided economies of scale and streamlined services. The results to date is now 263 days from the previous contractor average of 350 days, which includes the number of days from referral to completion of complex cases.

The service is provided at scale but also remains agile enough to respond to local instances a recent case of an applicant diagnosis with less than two years to live the case was treated with sensitivity and urgency by the staff with the process taking just under three weeks from receipt to grant approval and works to be completed.

▶ **The applicant stated, "That's the best news all week, thank you so much for all you have done for us".**


Stafford

Stafford

Case study: Digital transformation

Lichfield District Council has radically transformed customer services, embracing digital innovation with a focus on resident-centred design. Innovations include:

- Replacing over 200 online resident forms, with one single, unified form, making it easier for residents to report issues or request services and reducing failure demand.
- The council was one of the first local authorities in the UK to roll out the ability for residents to use WhatsApp to contact us about any service and get a same-day response. Over 700 WhatsApp enquiries are being answered per month with customer feedback being overwhelmingly positive.
- Utilising AI to support answering telephone enquiries. Since its launch in December 2024, it has answered more than 4,500 calls.
- Launched a series of online triage forms, giving residents detailed, consistent and compassionate answers without the need to call.

The impact has been that residents now get faster responses to their queries, calls into our contact centre have reduced by over 23%, customer service staff are able to focus their time on supporting those residents who need more help and staff satisfaction has increased.

The three unitary model will accelerate the adoption of digital innovation, data-driven decision making, and integrated service models. By breaking down silos and fostering collaboration across sectors, the new councils will be able to respond quickly to emerging needs, reduce duplication, and ensure that resources are targeted where they have the greatest impact.
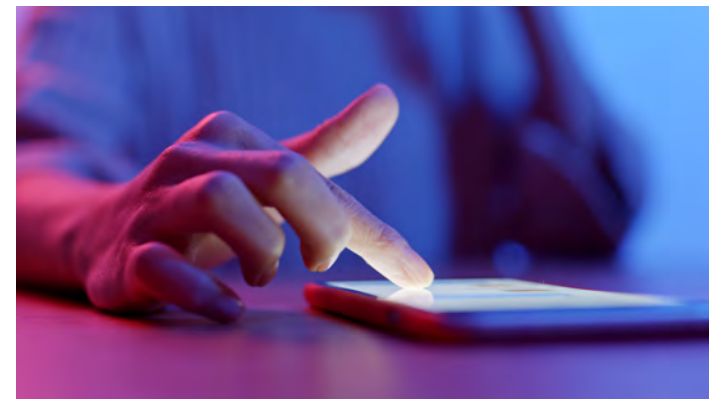
Act early and prevent demand, driven by insight, and ensuring that no one is left behind

Place-based councils, which are integral to our proposal, are uniquely positioned to deliver early intervention and prevention because they have a deep understanding of their communities and can build trusted relationships with residents and local partners. This proximity enables them to spot emerging issues, such as families at risk, rising social care needs, or early signs of homelessness, much sooner than larger authorities. By coordinating support locally and working in partnership with health, education, police, and the voluntary sector, three unitary councils can put in place joined-up solutions before problems escalate.

Key to addressing the Children's Services and Adult Social Care challenges is investing in genuine early intervention and prevention

Evidence shows that early intervention programmes are most successful when they build on the strengths and assets that already exist in communities; connection to place is critical. Locality-based teams can intervene early to keep older people living independently, support children and families before needs become acute, and prevent homelessness through rapid, multi-agency action. Councils with strong local connections and integrated, place-based working achieve better results in reducing demand and improving wellbeing.

The three unitary model will make full use of data insight and demand projections, learning from trailblazers in this area like London Borough of Barking and Dagenham and their Insight Hub, to anticipate emerging needs and target resources where they will have the greatest impact. By analysing trends in service usage, demographic changes, and local risk factors, councils can proactively manage demand and design interventions that prevent escalation. This intelligence-led approach ensures that support is delivered earlier, more efficiently, and tailored to the specific needs of each community, further reducing reliance on costly crisis services and ensuring that no one is left behind.

South Staffordshire

Stafford

Cannock

Consider the impact of our actions on environmental sustainability

Staffordshire is one of the most nature-depleted areas in the UK, with significant declines in species abundance since 1970, reflecting the broader crisis in the UK. Staffordshire has suffered habitat and species losses due to factors like land use changes and pollution. This is demonstrated by only 32% of the county's most important national sites (SSSIs) being in favourable condition and fewer than half of its Local Wildlife Sites being under appropriate management. Most councils in the county have declared some form of nature recovery commitment and developed strategies and plans to enhance biodiversity. Planning policies aim to reduce emissions through high standards for new developments, renewable energy integration, and sustainable transport.

A three unitary council model for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will significantly enhance environmental sustainability. Unified decision making across larger areas will allow for more coherent and strategic environmental policies. The three new unitary councils can align on climate goals, green infrastructure, and biodiversity protection where fragmented approaches exist today. The new Mayoral Strategic Authority will lead county-wide initiatives, unlocking additional powers and funding from Westminster to support sustainability projects.

We believe that consolidating services like waste management, transport, and planning under a smaller number of authorities will significantly reduce duplication and improve efficiency. For example, transport emissions could be tackled more effectively through integrated public transport systems, and sustainable fleet upgrades.

The three new unitary councils will have a greater understanding of the local area needs, energy requirements and environmental opportunities. They will also have more capacity to invest in green technologies, renewable energy, and climate resilience infrastructure. They will also be better placed, and the right size, to support community-level sustainability efforts, such as retrofitting homes, promoting circular economies, and enhancing green spaces.

Equally, with fewer councils, land use planning can be more strategic, ensuring developments are more sustainable, more resilient to climate change, and better aligned with biodiversity goals.

A simplified structure for local government will make it easier to track and report on environmental performance across the county. The three new unitary councils will be able to build on this by integrating sustainability metrics into all service areas - from planning to procurement.

Case study: Biodiversity brokerage

Lichfield District Council's wholly owned trading company – LWM – has pioneered a unique Biodiversity Brokerage Service that connects housing developers with landowners to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in line with the Environment Act 2021. This service is one of the first of its kind in local government. With the introduction of BNG, developers face increasing pressure to offset biodiversity loss resulting from construction. However, many lack access to suitable land or expertise to meet these obligations. Simultaneously, landowners often have underutilised land that could be repurposed for ecological enhancement but lack the means or knowledge to do so. LWM's brokerage service acts as a strategic intermediary, facilitating agreements between developers and landowners. The service:

- Identifies and assesses suitable land for biodiversity offsetting.
- Supports the creation and monitoring of Habitat Management Plans.

- Ensures compliance with national legislation and local planning policies.
- Provides long-term stewardship and tracking of biodiversity outcomes.

The service is enhancing biodiversity across the district through rewilding and habitat restoration, whilst generating revenue that is being reinvested back into local public services.

Lichfield District

Lichfield District

Lichfield District

Case study: Washlands Project

The East Staffordshire Washlands Project is a landmark initiative that reimagines Burton upon Trent's floodplain as a multifunctional landscape - balancing flood resilience, biodiversity, public amenity, and community engagement. Led by East Staffordshire Borough Council in partnership with the Environment Agency, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, and other public and private partners, the project spans 630 hectares of the River Trent floodplain. Key achievements of the project include:

- Enhanced biodiversity and ecological connectivity.
- Improved public access and recreational spaces.
- Restored natural river process and wetland habitats.
- Supports climate resilience.

East Staffordshire

Case study: Cannock Chase Can

Cannock Chase Can (CAN) is a pioneering health and wellbeing initiative developed by Cannock Chase District Council in collaboration with Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles and local community partners. Launched in response to rising health inequalities and lifestyle-related challenges, the initiative leverages digital technology, community engagement, and co-production to empower residents to take control of their health. Key features include:

- Cannock Chase Can App: A free mobile app that allows users to set personal wellness goals, track progress, and engage in themed challenges across eight wellbeing dimensions.
- Wellness Wheel: A visual self-assessment tool that helps users monitor their wellbeing across multiple domains.
- Community challenges: Activities co-created with local groups, such as interactive walks, heritage trails, and eco-therapy sessions, designed to be fun and inclusive.
- Local offers and rewards: Incentives from local businesses to encourage participation and support the local economy.

In 2024:

- Over 3,000 people engaged with the programme through various activities and events.
- More than 50 community organisations were involved in delivering health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Hundreds of hours of free physical activity sessions were provided across Cannock Chase.
- The initiative supported mental health, physical fitness, and social connection, especially among vulnerable groups.
- Digital engagement through the Cannock Chase Can app and social media reached thousands more, expanding the programme's accessibility.
- The project was shortlisted in the innovation category at the Local Government Chronicle Awards 2023.

Cannock

The following paragraphs set out how we will ensure key, critical services are safely transferred to the new unitary councils, while also being transformed to deliver better outcomes, greater efficiency, and stronger alignment with local priorities. We fully recognise the challenges of rising demand and costs in **Adult Social Care**. Ensuring continuity of care and key workers will be an absolute transition priority, minimising the impact of LGR on our most vulnerable residents. We are starting in a strong position with high quality services (CQC ratings) to build on. Following transition, we will explore opportunities for transformation, including alternative delivery models, seeking to disrupt the private sector-dominated market to ensure providers are focused and held accountable to deliver people-centred outcomes rather than being focused on outputs, cost savings and shareholder profit.

Our work has shown the three unitary model provides a better service delivery platform to:

- Manage future demand through locally-driven preventative approaches across all Adult Social Care service activities and reducing long-term care costs.

- Fully embed place-based and local community delivery models (working closely with the voluntary sector and the NHS), improving our ability to tailor services to local needs and local capacity and deliver a better, more sustainable workforce model.

- Further develop and enhance the strategic commissioning model and approach to market management to deliver more efficient and effective, local care and support services.

We will seek opportunities to work across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent as appropriate to identify potential for broader economies of scale and joint commissioning. We will have a 'one council' and system-wide approach to addressing the challenges in Adult Social Care, looking at how services such as planning, housing and leisure, alongside working with the community and voluntary sector, can keep people living independently for longer.

Children's Services in both existing upper-tier authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are currently rated as 'requires improvement'. Again, as with Adult Social Care, ensuring continuity of care and key workers will be an absolute transition priority for children's social care. Following transition, we will use our service design principles to transform Children's Services. The three unitary council model will have the scale and ability to respond to local needs, to develop and implement effective early intervention and prevention strategies – which is key to reducing demand and improving outcomes. The District Council Network report "Building the Best Places for Children and Families" highlights that:

> **"District and smaller councils understand local need and priorities in granular detail, are trusted by and connected to their communities and close to key partners: police, health, education, and the voluntary sector." – all of this is vital to improving outcomes for children and young people.**

The report advocates that smaller unitary councils should "think big for children, act local and build in a regional perspective". The report concludes that taking this approach will provide the benefits of scale but not detract from the real advantages of close, connected neighbourhood working where children and families feel they belong and can thrive.

We believe the three unitary model provides a better service delivery platform to:

- Maintain a close focus on local communities to promote early help and community support.
- Maintain quality and oversight by ensuring leaders are close to practice, building local strategic relationships and ensuring that strategic outcomes are implemented at a local level.
- Develop strategic commissioning approaches and capital spending programmes to ensure that sufficiency, value and outcomes are achieved in key areas including school places, SEND placements and local provision.

As with Adult Social Care, we will explore alternative delivery models and seek to hold external providers to account for outcomes not outputs. We recognise our model will mean there will be three Directors of Children Services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which will bring additional costs. However, we believe that the advantages of being focussed, closer and accountable to communities, will allow us to design and deliver effective place-based, preventative services.

These changes will deliver better service quality and better outcomes for residents and drive savings and efficiency gains in these services, as outlined in the Criterion 2 section of this document, while harnessing local strengths, working with the government agenda for reforms and building strong relationships with children, young people, Adult Social Care service users, their families and communities.

All councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are seeing rising demand for social **housing** and increasing numbers of families and residents presenting as **homeless.** The three unitary model will bring opportunities for a more holistic approach to early intervention and prevention by bringing all local government services together in localities to support people in need, retaining a close connection to the communities they serve to understand and respond to local need. Many of the existing councils are currently exploring alternative delivery models to meet the rising need for temporary accommodation and social housing. LGR offers an opportunity to scale-up these models quickly, to offer more accommodation options to residents. This includes building on the existing relationships district and boroughs have with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) based on a shared, deep understanding of local need. These relationships offer a real opportunity to accelerate at pace the delivery of affordable housing that meets local need. Two existing district and borough councils in the South of the county **hold social housing stock** and have Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA) – Cannock Chase District Council and Tamworth Borough Council. This is in addition to Stoke-on-Trent in the North. Our model therefore means that each of the three new unitary councils will hold housing stock in this way and ensuring that tenants receive continuity of customer service and support during the transition to the new unitary councils will be a key priority.

Case study: Transforming housing

Lichfield District Council has launched a new housing, homelessness, and rough sleeping strategy for 2025–2030, underpinned by a bold vision: "A home for all, with no one left behind." This strategy responds to challenges in the housing system - rising rents, declining affordability, and increasing demand for emergency accommodation - with a commitment to innovation, compassion, and systemic change. The strategy sets out a target for the council to directly deliver 200 new affordable homes for rent, including 30 high-quality temporary homes. Partnership working has been key to both developing the strategy and taking forward its delivery plan. The council has already successfully purchased and refitted 20 temporary accommodation units, offering residents most in need a warm, safe home.

Lichfield District

Planning is a key service that has a profound impact on our places. The three unitary model will bring county/city council and district and borough council planning functions into a holistic service, whilst retaining a close connection to communities to ensure that planning decisions reflect local character, needs and priorities. Under the current two-tier system, district and borough councils handle planning, while the County Council manages transport and infrastructure planning. This split often leads to conflicting policies, delays, and poor coordination. District and boroughs in Staffordshire have a strong track record in collaborating and coordinating efforts to develop shared evidence bases for Local Plans. As an example, five out of six district and boroughs in the South of the county have jointly commissioning a Greenbelt Review to inform their Local Plans following the addition in the National Planning Policy Framework of a grey belt definition. The three unitary model will support more effective and efficient decision making concerning planning applications, driving economic growth and prosperity. It will integrate planning, transport, housing, and infrastructure under one roof, enabling streamlined decision making and better alignment between

development and infrastructure investment. While two large unitary councils might struggle to balance diverse regional needs, the three unitary councils will be able to focus strategically on their own functional economic areas. We believe shared economic, social, and historical ties can inform more coherent planning strategies.

South Staffordshire

East Staffordshire

Highways

Highways are a significant challenge in Staffordshire, which is equally experienced throughout the Country. Under the three unitary proposal we are proposing, single councils will be responsible for all local services, including highways. This will enable us to streamline governance and remove overlaps between county and district councils, leading to faster, more coherent decision making on highways projects. By consolidating all elements of the highways function under unitary authorities in this way, residents will see more consistent local standards in road maintenance, quicker response times, and better coordination with other infrastructure projects.

We believe the three unitary model, alongside the new Strategic Authority and its increased devolved funding and clearer accountability will lead to improved coordination and delivery of infrastructure projects, which will play a key role in enabling the unitary authorities to become the 'economic drivers' for the region we want them to be.

The success of this reorganisation will be judged by the experiences of residents and service users. The three-unitary model is designed to make services more accessible and responsive, ensuring they are tailored to local needs. This approach aims to increase satisfaction, build trust, and deliver better outcomes for all communities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

South Staffordshire

South Staffordshire

Criterion 4
Working together to understand local needs

Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

All three councils have strived to work collaboratively with all councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent since the publication of the White Paper. The three unitary model is the only model being proposed that will ensure that local government remains embedded in its communities. Over 16,700 people responded to our LGR survey where there was overwhelming support the two unitary councils being created in the South of the county, alongside a Northern unitary council.

> **A key benefit of the existing two-tier model is that the district and borough councils know their communities so well, they understand place, the local challenges, opportunities and how service delivery and communications need to flex to meet local needs.**

Our proposal for three unitary councils is built on a foundation of place-based working, deep community engagement, and collaborative partnership, ensuring that every voice is heard and that services are shaped around what matters most to local people. It is vital that local government retains this deep understanding of its communities and the importance of local relationships. Only the three unitary model seeks to protect and enhance this deep understanding of local communities.

Collaboration in the development of proposals

Following publication of the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, the Staffordshire Leaders Board met and discussed how to proceed. Councils were largely in agreement that the current structures of local government work in our county and regarded a devolution deal as the real prize worth pursuing for residents. Subsequent correspondence from the Minister made it clear there is no 'opt out' from LGR and so work began on developing our proposals.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council published its initial view on their option for unitary coverage in the North of the county early, in mid-February. At that point there had been limited engagement with Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. In late February, Staffordshire County Council (prior to the change in administration in May 2025), published its intention to pursue a single county-wide unitary council based on the existing district and borough geographies, but excluding the city of Stoke-on-Trent, as the only viable model for LGR. With the change of administration after the election, the County Council in mid-September reassessed its options and published its new preferred option of a two unitary model splitting Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent into two unitary councils – an East/West split.

These steps by the existing unitary and 'upper tier' authority placed restrictions on the extent that we could work collaboratively on a shared evidence base. The six districts and boroughs in the South of the county sought to work collaboratively from the outset, and until it became clear there were opposing views over what is in the best interests of our residents.

Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire District Council and Tamworth Borough Council - the authors of this proposal - wanted to ensure that our residents, businesses, stakeholders and staff members were at the centre of developing this proposal. A multi-channel engagement campaign was implemented using a blend of digital and in-person methods to maximise reach and accessibility. This included:

- Printed surveys, including tailored formats for accessibility.
- Online survey that was easily accessible on computers, tablets and phones.
- In-person drop-in sessions.
- Digital engagement through social media, email newsletters, and other online platforms.
- Community outreach via local community stakeholders.
- Pop-up events with branded materials and council staff to build visibility and trust.
- Focus groups.
- Briefing sessions with parish councils.

Over 16,700 people responded to our survey.
The scale of our response reflects not only the effectiveness of our communication and outreach strategies, but also the high level of public interest and trust in our engagement processes. It is particularly noteworthy that the delivery of our engagement activity incurred no external expenditure, our approach was entirely managed in-house. This not only demonstrates prudent financial stewardship but also reflects the strength and capability of our internal teams to deliver high-impact engagement without additional cost.

Direct, face-to-face interaction with residents was a key element of our engagement strategy.
Officers attended a wide range of community events, speaking with hundreds of individuals across diverse settings. This proactive approach ensured that voices from all parts of the community were heard, including those who may not typically engage through digital channels.

To meet both the needs of our communities and government standards, the community engagement aimed to:

- **Be inclusive,** ensuring no community is left out.
- **Clearly explain the options and implications,** including benefits, trade-offs, and potential changes to services or governance.
- **Provide opportunities for informed feedback,** not just opinion polling.
- **Be proportionate and robust,** generating data that can withstand scrutiny from government and stakeholders.
- **Be aligned with statutory guidance,** including the Cabinet Office Consultation Principles and MHCLG expectations for LGR proposals.
- **Be independently verifiable,** with transparent reporting of methods, findings, and how feedback influenced decisions

All councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent collaborated and held joint stakeholder interviews to understand their views and options on local government reorganisation. Interviews were undertaken with:

- Integrated Care Board
- Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals North Midlands
- Birmingham Chamber of Commerce
- Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Keele University
- Newcastle and Stafford College Group
- South Staffordshire College
- Stoke-on-Trent City College
- Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
- Staffordshire Police
- Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Five out of 12 Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent MPs
- Support Staffordshire
- Staffordshire Parish Council Association
- Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services
- Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent (VAST)

The purpose of these interviews was to explore a set of broad themes in relation to local government reorganisation. They focused on gaining feedback on:

- Current services, both what works well and less well.
- What opportunities or risks there are.
- How fewer, bigger councils can maintain strong local connections.
- How councils could deliver more efficient services.
- How LGR might impact partnership working.

Lichfield District

A number of key themes came out of these discussions, all of which align and/or support our three unitary council proposal:

- **Opportunity to improve efficiency, financial sustainability and services:** Many stakeholders recognised that the two-tier system can be confusing for residents, as such simplified governance structures would make it easier for residents to access services. Stakeholders also recognised there was an opportunity to reduce duplication and deliver financial savings.

- **Caution over projected financial savings:** Whilst many did believe that LGR would deliver financial savings, a number of stakeholders expressed scepticism as to the level of savings that would actually be delivered.

- **Risk of larger councils becoming remote:** Many stakeholders shared their concerns that larger councils could become remote from the communities they serve, risking loss of local accountability and democratic engagement.

- **LGR must preserve local identities:** There was a strong emphasis throughout all the interviews on the need to preserve local identities, with stakeholders providing examples of the differences that exist between communities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

- **Strong support for devolution:** Many stakeholders referenced the significant opportunities that devolution could bring to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

- **Concerns over disruption that LGR will cause:** Stakeholders raised concerns over the disruption that LGR will cause, both in terms of the time and resources that will be needed to implement new structures and the re-setting of partnership relationships once the new structures are in place.

- **Opportunity to strengthen partnership working:** Many stakeholders saw the move to unitary councils as an opportunity to strengthen partnership working in the long-term.

Cannock

East Staffordshire

Whilst the interviews didn't ask stakeholders directly to share their views on a preferred option for LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, a number provided important feedback on options being considered:

- **The MP for Great Wyrley, Stone and Penkridge** stated that his ideal (if the status quo can't be maintained) was for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to be split into three unitary councils - a North, a South-East and a South-West.
- **The MP for Cannock Chase** voiced his strong opposition to large councils and expressed his concern over a two unitary model, especially if one council has a population of up to 650,000. He views this size as too large to be considered "local government".
- **The MP for Kingswinford and South Staffordshire** states that smaller, more locally-focused authorities are better suited to reflect community identity and needs. He advocates for flexibility in authority size, prioritising community relevance over arbitrary population thresholds.
- **The MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central** stated "It would be inconceivable that Stoke and Newcastle will not end up in something together" because their economic geography is deeply connected, making them a logical geography.

As well as the joint engagement campaign, survey and stakeholder interviews, each council also undertook their own localised engagement activities. Key highlights of local activities are summarised below.

Lichfield District Council has:
- Held an LGR 'Meet the Leader' event, which was oversubscribed and attended by approximately 100 people.
- Held an LGR 'Business Breakfast', with approximately 15 of our largest local employers.
- Held a number of focus group sessions with council staff.
- Reached out to a sample of parish and town councils, offering to meet and discuss LGR - of which eight took up the offer.

South Staffordshire District Council has:
- Attended numerous community events in each of their five localities, engaging directly with hundreds of residents across the district.
- Held engagement events with local councillors, parish councils, community stakeholders and council staff.
- Issued a leader's video and newsletter invitation to encourage resident participation.
- Hosted a dedicated Business Ambassadors roundtable, engaging key local employers in discussion on LGR implications, economic priorities, and future service design.
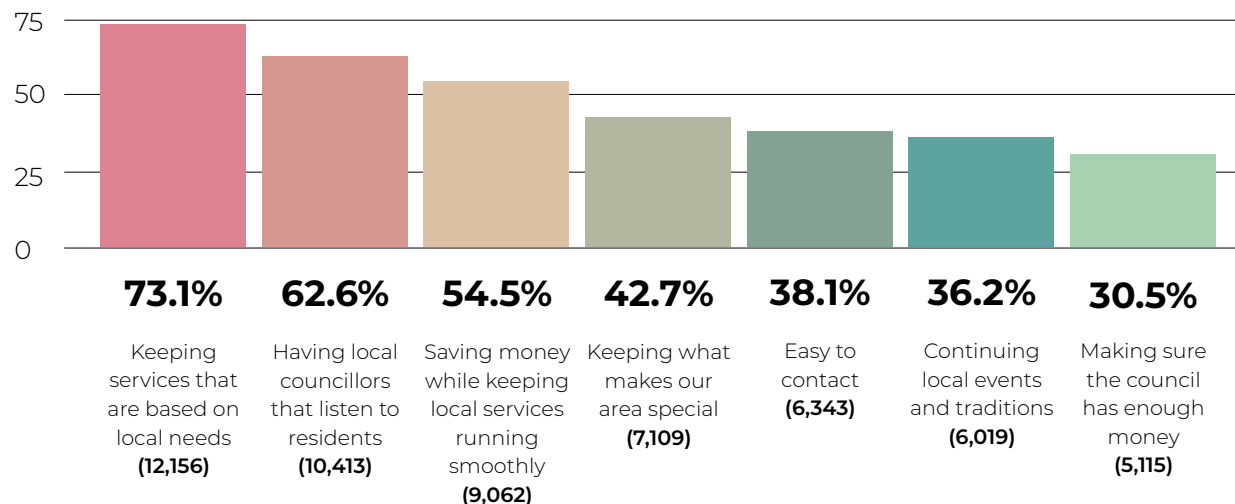
Tamworth Borough Council has:

- Held three community drop-in sessions at various locations across the borough, with the council leader and cabinet members, directly engaging over 220 people.
- Held two focus group sessions with tenants and residents to have a more in-depth discussion.
- Invited over 40 key local stakeholders to an engagement session to specifically understand the impact of local government reorganisation on them and how they work.
- Delivered a leader's video, shared across social media, explaining local government reorganisation and what it means for Tamworth.
- Held an all-staff session with the chief executive and leader of the council to gather views and answer questions.

A number of stakeholders and MPs have written letters of support for the three unitary model - these can be found in Appendix 4.

Whilst Stoke-on-Trent City Council aren't formally endorsing our proposal, they have stated that their submission will confirm they would be willing to work with a three unitary model, should that be government's preferred option – see Appendix 5.

Top priorities for a new council
Survey results

|						
73.1%	**62.6%**	**54.5%**	**42.7%**	**38.1%**	**36.2%**	**30.5%**
Keeping services that are based on local needs (12,156)	Having local councillors that listen to residents (10,413)	Saving money while keeping local services running smoothly (9,062)	Keeping what makes our area special (7,109)	Easy to contact (6,343)	Continuing local events and traditions (6,019)	Making sure the council has enough money (5,115)

- 73% of people said their top priority for the new unitary councils would be **keeping services that are based on local needs.**
- 62% want to have **local councillors that listen to residents.**
- More than half want the **new councils to save money while keeping local services running smoothly.**

The three unitary model is the only option that effectively addresses these priorities. The two unitary options would see either a large unitary in the South, or a large unitary established in the East. Even by establishing area committees, it will be very challenging to ensure local government can respond effectively to local need with a population of more than 680,000 people and across the broad geography these options propose. We believe the three unitary model offers the best balance of keeping services local, being agile enough to respond to local need, whilst still being able to achieve economies of scale.

Our service design principles clearly demonstrate our commitment to understand local need and take this opportunity to radically transform public services for the benefit of our residents and businesses. Embracing different delivery models, acting in the best interests of the place, integrating across sectors to secure the best outcomes and prioritising innovation and continuous improvement.

What is the most important in how services are delivered in a new council
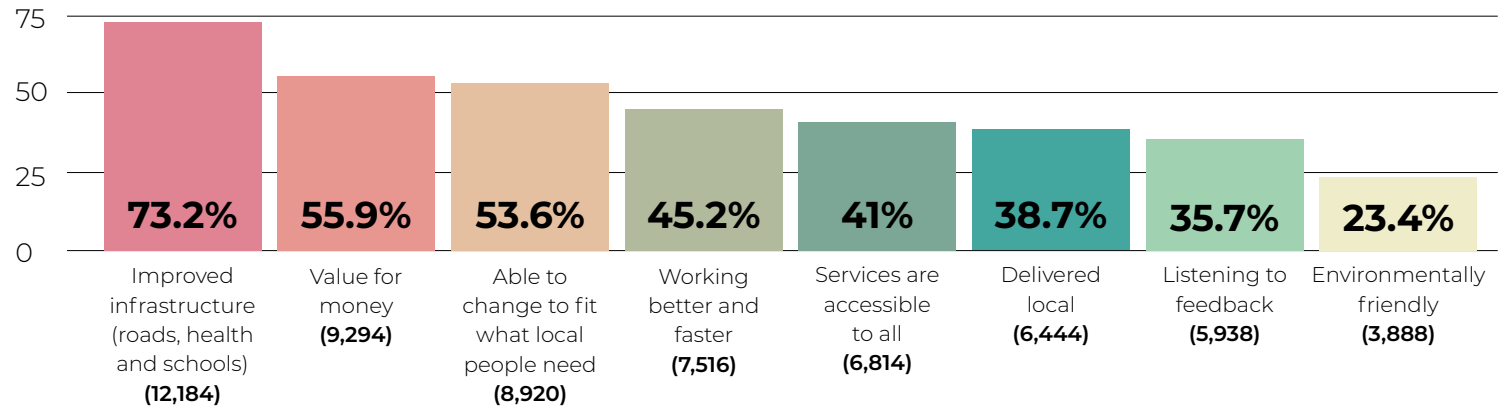
- 73% of respondents want **improved infrastructure.**
- Nearly 56% want **value for money.**
- More than half want the new councils to be **able to change to fit what local people need.**

Districts and borough councils have always advocated an **infrastructure first approach to growth** which proves more challenging on a larger geographical footprint. A three unitary model will allow local infrastructure issues and pressures to be better understood and will be more agile in their response than two unitary councils covering larger geographies.

As outlined in earlier sections of this case for change, creating two unitary councils in the South of the county will deliver £15.1m net annual savings and a Northern unitary is estimated to produce a further £21.2m of net annual savings. Via our service design principles, we are committed to radically transform public services for the benefit of our residents and businesses, improving outcomes and value for money.

We asked respondents to share with us their preference as **to how many unitary councils they would like to see established in the South of the county.** While across the six districts in the South 66% preferred the option of two councils in the South, removing those respondents who didn't express any preference at all shows:

- **82% of respondents who expressed an opinion, preferred the option of two councils in the South.** In Lichfield district this figure was 86%, 85% in South Staffordshire and 87% in Tamworth.

- 18% of respondents who expressed an opinion, preferred the option of one council in the South.

The three **biggest concerns raised by respondents concerning local government organisation were:**

- **Loss of local identity / representation** (approximately 1,890 responses)

Many respondents expressed fears that moving to a larger unitary structure would weaken local identity and make councils feel more distant from residents. There was concern that local voices could be diluted, community character lost, and elected members less connected to the people and places they represent.

- **Services becoming remote or less responsive** (approximately 740 mentions)

Respondents worried that essential local services could become harder to access or less tailored to local needs. Comments referenced reduced visibility of staff, longer travel times to access support, and the potential closure or centralisation of local offices.

- **Bureaucracy / lack of accountability** (approximately 320 mentions)

Some residents felt that a larger council could introduce more bureaucracy and slower decision making, with concerns that efficiencies might come at the expense of transparency and responsiveness. Several respondents questioned whether savings would truly be passed on to residents.

The scale and depth of our engagement demonstrates our commitment to listening and responding to local priorities. We believe the three unitary model is the only option being proposed that addresses these concerns.

As outlined in the earlier section, we recognise that across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent there are differing local identities and, as such, three unitary councils is the best option to be able to retain and respond to these local differences.

We believe **place-based working** must be at the heart of our approach to public service delivery and community engagement in the new local government structures. Our proposal recognises that every community is unique, with its own strengths, challenges, and aspirations, and that services are most effective when they are shaped around the specific needs of people and places.

The Collaborate (for social change) July 2025 report – "The bigger you go, the less you know" succinctly builds the case for why **place-based, relational approaches to public services should be core to local government reorganisation proposals.** The report reminds us that LGR is an opportunity to recommit to what local government is for, what it can do, and why it matters. It's an opportunity to put purpose at the heart of decisions about what new, old, and amalgamated institutions and their partners do, how they do it, and who they do it for.

Collaborate's piece, and our own work on developing this proposal, points to a different approach being needed from local government; one where councils work with community organisations, building capacity and capability, co-locating to work jointly at a hyper-local scale. Evidence supports the argument that place-based, relational working should be at the heart of the operating model for new unitary authorities as the only way to deliver trust and public service reform at the scale required, and the correlating impact this has on economic opportunity.

Cannock

Tamworth

To operationalise place-based working, the new unitary councils will adopt organisational structures that enable 'horizontal working' across services and geographies. District and borough councils already have a strong track record in organising themselves around residents - and communities. The County Council has also organised their children's services into district-based teams, and we'd look to build on this, ensuring other key services were organised with a place-based focus. By embedding place-based working into the organisational DNA of the new councils, we will ensure that every community benefits from responsive, joined-up services and that local voices are at the centre of decision making.

By exploring locality boards and area committees, the new unitary councils will be able to bring together officers from different service areas, elected members, and community representatives to co-design and deliver solutions tailored to the unique needs of each place. This approach will break down traditional silos, ensuring that services such as health, housing, education, and community safety are planned and delivered in an integrated way at a local level.

Tamworth

Stafford

# Case study: Working together to understand local needs in Tamworth

The Heritage Crafts Programme at Tamworth Castle was developed in response to local consultation that highlighted a strong community desire to reconnect with Tamworth's rich heritage and traditional skills. Recognising the unique identity of Tamworth as a historic market town, the council worked in partnership with local schools, community groups, heritage organisations, and artisans to co-design a programme that would both celebrate local history and provide new opportunities for learning and engagement.

The programme offers a series of workshops, demonstrations, and events focused on traditional crafts such as blacksmithing, weaving, pottery, and woodwork. Activities are co-designed with local partners to ensure they reflect the interests and needs of Tamworth's diverse communities, including young people, older residents, and underrepresented groups.

Over 1,000 residents have participated, with sessions held at Tamworth Castle and in community venues across the borough. The programme also supports local artisans and small businesses, providing them with a platform to share their skills and connect with new audiences.

Outcomes:

- **Deepened understanding of local needs:** The co-design approach ensured that the programme was relevant, accessible, and valued by the community.
- **Feedback from participants:** Has shaped future activities and ensured ongoing relevance.
- **Strengthened community identity:** By celebrating Tamworth's unique heritage, the programme has fostered pride and a sense of belonging among residents.
- **Skills development and inclusion:** Participants have gained new skills, confidence, and social connections, with targeted outreach to groups at risk of isolation.
- **Sustainable partnerships:** The programme has built lasting relationships between the council, schools, voluntary sector, and local businesses, creating a foundation for future collaboration.

Tamworth
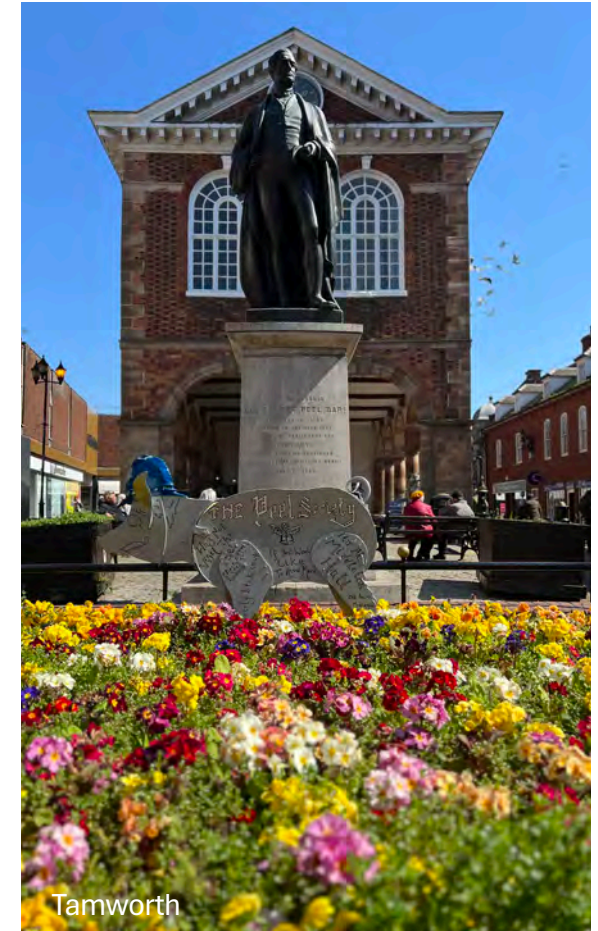
Place-based working is not just a method, it's a mindset. It shifts the focus from siloed, top-down service provision to **collaborative, locally-informed solutions.** By aligning resources, data, and decision making with the lived realities of residents, we can:

- **Improve outcomes** by tailoring services to local needs.
- **Empower communities** to co-design and co-deliver solutions.
- **Strengthen partnerships** across public, private, and voluntary sectors.
- **Build trust** through visible, responsive local leadership

The three unitary model will explore formalising partnership working through locality boards and joint commissioning arrangements, ensuring that local NHS, police, schools, and voluntary sector partners are directly involved in shaping and delivering services. This will embed collaborative decision making at the local level and ensure that solutions are tailored to the unique needs of each community.

When done well, place-based working can transform how communities experience public services, and that is our aspiration. It enables:

- **Faster, more agile responses** to local issues.
- **Greater civic participation,** with residents feeling heard and valued.
- **Integrated support,** especially for vulnerable groups, through joined up working across health, housing, education, and social care.
- Economic **regeneration**, by aligning local investment with community priorities.

Our three unitary model will be uniquely positioned to make place-based working a reality:

- **Closer proximity to communities** means we can build stronger relationships and understand local nuances.
- **Simplified governance structures** allow for quicker decision making and more coherent service integration.
- **Greater flexibility** to innovate and adapt without the constraints of larger bureaucracies.
- **Stronger accountability,** with clearer lines of responsibility and more visible leadership.

In short, our smaller scale is our strength. It enables us to be **more connected, more responsive, and more effective** in delivering the outcomes that matter most to our residents. This builds trust, empowers communities, and ensures that local government is truly accountable to the people it serves.

# Case study: Honest Conversations - building shared understanding in Tamworth

In summer 2024, following local unrest, Tamworth Borough Council commissioned the Belong Network to lead the "Honest Conversations" project. This initiative brought together over 500 residents, community groups, schools, faith organisations, and local agencies in a series of workshops, focus groups, interviews, and dialogue events. The project's asset-based methodology prioritised listening, trust building, and co-production. Seldom-heard voices, involving asylum seekers, families affected by disorder, and professionals from the voluntary sector were included.

Key themes emerged:

- Residents expressed concerns about economic and social change, the impact of migration, and the need to address racism and prejudice.
- There was widespread frustration with service delivery and a call for improved partnership working between agencies.
- Despite challenges, a strong sense of pride and optimism about Tamworth's future was evident.

Tamworth

The council and partners used these insights to co-design a refreshed community engagement strategy, embedding ongoing workshops, skill-sharing sessions, and tension monitoring systems. This collaborative approach enabled Tamworth to develop targeted interventions, build trust, and ensure that local needs are understood and addressed through partnership working.

Tamworth
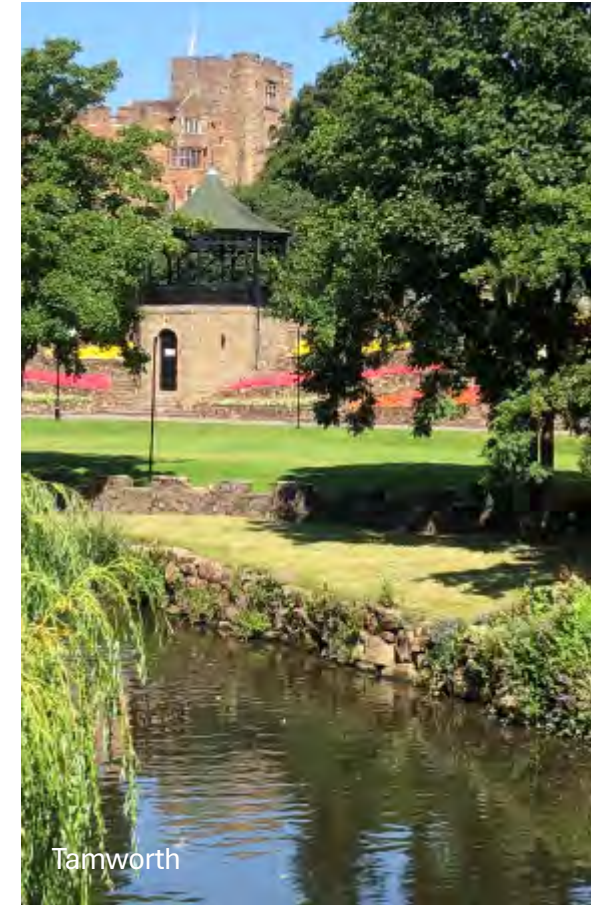
Criterion 5
Supporting devolution arrangements

▶▶ Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

The three unitary model will support the establishment of a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Mayoral Strategic Authority, creating three balanced unitary councils to be constituent members. It would also support the creation of a broader Strategic Authority, if necessary, involving neighbouring authorities not currently covered by a Strategic Authority to ensure there are no devolution islands.

> ► **Whilst the population of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (approaching 1.2 million) is below the government's 1.5 million population target for Strategic Authorities, the White Paper recognises in some places this may not be met.**

Given the significant amount of partnership working across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, alongside the coterminosity with key public sector stakeholders, including the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Integrated Care Board and NHS Trusts, this proposal is aligned with other submissions from across the county and recommends the creation of a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority.

A three unitary model would complement a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority by creating three unitary councils with a more balanced population and GVA, better able to advocate on behalf of local and economic needs.

Entity	Population	Gross Value added
Northern unitary	494,803	£12.0 - £12.5 billion
South-West unitary	360,067	£8.0 - £9.0 billion
South-East unitary	322,708	£8.5 - £10.0 billion
Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority	1,177,578	£28.7 billion

The two unitary options being proposed would create a significant size imbalance across the parties in the Strategic Authority, putting it at risk from the start. The East/West option would see a population split of c.690,000 in the East, compared to c.480,000 in the West, while the North/South two unitary options would have a split of c.495,000 in the North and c.680,000 in the South. By 2040, this imbalance would further grow with both the East/West and North/South split creating one dominant authority of nearly 750,000. We believe this will undoubtedly lead to competition and challenging discussions within the Strategic Authority on resource allocations.

Our research shows that larger authorities tend to dilute local democracy; as the size of a local authority increases, voter turnout, trust in councillors, and community engagement all decline. A dominant unitary, regardless of the split, would likely overshadow the smaller one(s) in regional decision making, leading to unequal influence over shared strategic issues like transport, housing, and economic development. If one unitary is significantly larger, it could dominate the strategic agenda, making collaboration difficult and undermining the principle of equal partnership. Equally, we believe a large unitary might pursue county-wide or urban-centric priorities with one-size-fits-all solutions, rather than locally-appropriate options, while the smaller unitary could struggle to assert its own localised planning and economic needs. This imbalance could lead to inequitable infrastructure investment, with the larger authority attracting more funding and attention.

Large unitary authorities erode community identity, especially in areas with distinct local histories and civic traditions like Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Smaller authorities are better positioned to preserve local character, but may be sidelined in broader regional strategies if paired with a dominant partner. A mismatched pair could lead to inefficient governance, with duplicated efforts or conflicting priorities between the two units.

Significantly, our work shows that residents in the smaller unitary may feel disenfranchised or marginalised, especially if strategic decisions are perceived to be driven by the larger authority. This can have the effect of undermining public trust and legitimacy in the new governance model.

Lichfield District

Stafford

> **Our proposal for three unitary councils, with far more evenly-balanced population splits, best serves and positions the new Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority to unlock economic growth across the geography.**

It would:

- Promote balanced strategic collaboration.
- Ensure fair representation in regional governance.
- Support tailored planning and service delivery aligned with local needs.

With new unitary authorities able to take a coherent and strategic approach to planning for growth which reflects and understands local needs, the new Strategic Mayoral Authority will be in the strongest possible position to focus on using its devolved powers to deliver on the national missions.

Whilst a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority is our preferred model, we also recognise central government's clear objective to avoid 'devolution islands'. As such, we would be willing to work with neighbouring authorities in a larger Strategic Authority if required. Again, our three unitary proposal is the only one that would avoid the risk of an imbalance, if overly dominant authorities were amongst smaller unitary councils - particularly if Telford and Wrekin (population c. 200,000) and Shropshire (population c. 330,000) were considered alongside Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in creating a single Strategic Authority for the sub-region.

The UK government has developed five missions as part of its pledge to be a mission-led government that delivers change. The three unitary model will create more robust, efficient and strategically capable local councils that can support the Strategic Authority, whatever geography it encompasses, to

deliver national missions; particularly those related to economic growth, skills, planning, transport, fiscal responsibility and public service delivery.

A number of district and borough councils in the South of the county have worked in partnership with West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) either informally or formally for a number of years. This places a new Strategic Authority in a strong position to develop good working relationships with the WMCA, who have stated a willingness, quickly.

South Staffordshire

South Staffordshire Council has fostered positive relationships with the City of Wolverhampton as part of the WMCA. While our work is rooted in county-level relationships, our geography means we also collaborate across boundaries with many West Midlands authorities. We share strategic challenges and opportunities, and many of the strategies we develop are best addressed at a regional level. At a local level, the council also engages in place making, housing market areas and functional economic geography footprints. Similarly, its strongest link to the West Midlands combined authority is through the delivery of the Enterprise Zone and the shared business rates pot which has been achieved through the growth made possible by collaborative working. Cannock Chase District Council and Tamworth Borough Council are both reduced voting members of WMCA. We recognise that as part of the implementation planning for LGR, this will need to be considered in light of any final decisions on devolution for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. A three unitary model will allow relationships with neighbouring combined authorities to continue, whilst fully supporting a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority.

The three new unitary councils will formalise joint working through shared strategic boards, joint investment plans, and regular, structured, engagement with the Mayoral Strategic Authority. This approach will enable coordinated action on cross-boundary issues while maintaining strong local accountability. It will provide balanced representation around the Strategic Authority table across diverse areas such as rural and urban economies, and political perspectives. In addition, this structure offers Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent the opportunity to harness complementary strengths of each area and address unique challenges with shared solutions, ultimately delivering balanced and inclusive growth across the whole geography.

Devolution will enable the Mayoral Strategic Authority to take responsibility for strategic transport and infrastructure planning and delivery, ensuring that travel and logistics routes are developed around economic functionalities and not county administrative boundaries. This approach will support rural residents accessing jobs in urban hubs and facilitate the efficient movement of goods.

> **Our view is that a three unitary model in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with a better balance of size and influence than the two unitary models propose, will provide the Mayoral Strategic Authority with strategic regional leadership, local democratic responsiveness and operational resilience.**

Criterion 6
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

The three unitary model is the only option being proposed that recognises the importance of keeping decision making local, ensuring decisions are made close to the people they affect. This model will provide strong democratic accountability and further empower communities.

Throughout this proposal we have evidenced how the three unitary model will **better understand local need, be closer to communities and able to embed community power.** We believe that the alternative two unitary models will be too remote and too large to be able to respond to, and engage with, communities effectively. Spanning unconnected communities, with differing local identities, needs and opportunities, it will be very challenging to deliver high-quality, efficient services that reflect local needs and actually improve outcomes.

As has been demonstrated in earlier sections, district and borough councils have a deep understanding of the needs and opportunities that exist in their areas and have developed meaningful engagement mechanisms with stakeholders, residents and businesses. It is imperative that LGR builds on this foundation and recognises that **local government needs to 'stay local'.**

Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent there are 195 existing **Town and Parish Councils.** Parish and Town Councils have and play an important role in supporting stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment. Where they exist, we are committed to working with them to explore the art of the possible concerning double devolution, area committees and opportunities for strengthening partnership working. In unparished areas such as Tamworth Borough, we will seek to work with existing anchor community organisations to ensure there is a strong local input into the development of any parishes, area committee models or place-based working proposals.

This engagement will need to be done in a way that is reflective of local circumstances and cannot be done in a uniformed way. The size and scale of town and parish councils vary significantly across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent - from Bridgtown Parish Council in Cannock Chase, with a population of c. 2000, to Burntwood Town Council in Lichfield District, with a population of c. 29,000. In two-way discussions with town and parish councils on double devolution we need to ensure we avoid inadvertently re-creating district councils in all but name and instead build on local strengths and opportunities.

We understand the Government's emerging position on Area Committees, which are being promoted as the primary model for neighbourhood governance. They are intended to be led by ward councillors; to include parish/town councillors and community representatives and their purpose will be to **deepen localism** and ensure **community voices are heard** in decision making.

We have been encouraged to embed these committees into our final reorganisation proposals, to show how we will maintain local engagement and community representation, and we fully endorse this approach. For us, from the work we have done to date, area committees need to be on a broader geography than single parishes and must focus on protecting the **community voice** in larger governance models. We will explore **area committee models** as a potential option to further empower neighbourhoods. We will seek to learn from other areas that have implemented similar models well. We are clear that when area committees are implemented, they must:

- Add value to and not duplicate existing local partnerships.
- Be supported and welcomed by local communities – e.g. not be a top-down construct.
- Have a clear role and purpose, with empowering communities at their core.

The three unitary model will inherit a strong foundation in **effective community engagement approaches** from the district and borough councils. As has been evidenced earlier in this proposal, the LGR survey run by the district and borough councils in the South led to over 16,700 responses being submitted, one of the largest responses to an LGR survey in the country. We will build on these foundations to ensure community engagement, co-production and community power are at the core of the three new unitary councils.

Community power is the principle that local people should have meaningful influence over the decisions and services that affect their lives. It goes beyond consultation, placing communities at the heart of governance and service design. In our proposal for smaller unitary council structures in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, we embrace community power as a way to strengthen local democracy, improve service responsiveness, and build trust between residents and government.

By devolving decision making to the most local level - through empowered town and parish councils, area committees, and neighbourhood partnerships - we can ensure that governance is not only more efficient but also more representative. The three unitary council model is ideally placed to embed community power, enabling tailored solutions that reflect the unique needs of each locality and fostering a culture of collaboration between residents and their councils. Our model guarantees MHCLG that councils will remain close to their communities, with manageable elector-to-member ratios and structures that support genuine local participation. This proximity enables more responsive governance, stronger relationships with local organisations, and greater opportunities for co-production and double devolution.

South Staffordshire

Case study: We Are Tamworth - Empowering Communities through crowdfunding and events

Tamworth Borough Council's "We Are Tamworth" programme demonstrates innovative community engagement and empowerment. Supported by government funding and delivered in partnership with Spacehive, the initiative enables local groups to design and crowdfund projects that strengthen resilience to hate and intolerance, promote cohesion, and celebrate diversity.

Key features:

- Projects must demonstrate community benefit, encourage partnership working, and foster trust and integration.
- The council provides matched funding and expert support, helping groups deliver impactful projects, from arts festivals and wellbeing programmes, to initiatives supporting underrepresented groups and promoting volunteering.
- Flagship events such as the Kaleidoscope festival and the launch of Spacehive have brought together councillors, local businesses, and residents to share ideas and build momentum.
- These efforts have increased participation, strengthened neighbourhood bonds, and empowered residents to shape their environment and future.

The Kaleidoscope Festival is an annual flagship event in Tamworth that brings together residents from all backgrounds to celebrate diversity through arts, music, food, and storytelling. The festival:

- Provides a platform for underrepresented groups and local artists.
- Fosters dialogue and understanding between different communities.
- Is co-designed with community partners, ensuring relevance and ownership.
- Attracts significant participation and positive feedback, strengthening Tamworth's reputation as an inclusive and welcoming place.

Spacehive projects have had high levels of participation from residents, councillors, and local businesses. Notably, 65% of Spacehive users were fundraising for the first time, broadening civic engagement and empowering new voices.

Tamworth
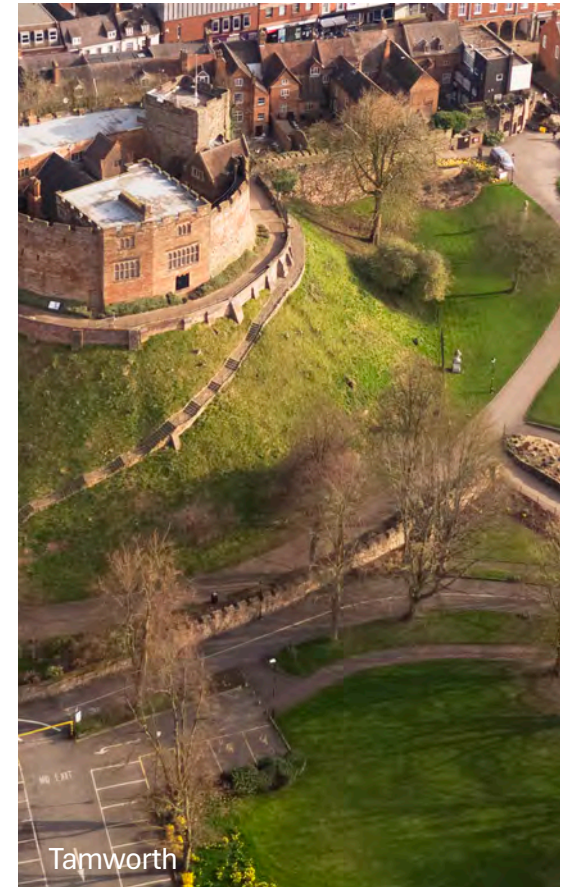
Case study: Localities+

In 2008, in the original design for localities, South Staffordshire Council drew on the best practice principles of neighbourhood working from urban authorities to formulate the South Staffordshire Locality Model - one of the first rural models to be developed. The Locality Model was designed to connect with our communities, elected members and partners with an emphasis on place. Our five localities stayed true to parish boundaries and allowed for alignment into partner policies and strategies. The model has continued to evolve over the years and has been recognised across the local government family as best practice. The approach offers a way we can connect with our communities in a coherent and joined up way. Over the last few years, the model has developed to include businesses.

From the offset, the design included:

Locality Profiles – data sets broken down to localities making commissioning of services more targeted.

Place Narrative – produced alongside each Council Plan, to refresh data sets and assist in establishing priorities.

Communications – including Parish Summits, three- tier member forums, meetings with parish clerks, to which partners are also invited.

Localities + provides a sound basis to build on and explore the area committee model.

Outcomes:

- Delivered over 80 locally identified environmental improvement projects.

- Developed and delivered a 'pension credit' campaign to our residents with targeted advice and guidance -targeting those who could be eligible for winter fuel allowance.

- Increased our Wellbeing Walks programme across all localities and now have 67 walk volunteers.

- Linked with health partners to deliver bespoke rehabilitation sessions from our leisure centres.

- Worked with parish councils to establish new allotments in our village and draw down funding to support existing allotments across the district.

- Using the Locality model to develop a Living Independently project with County Council Public health colleagues.

- Provided digital support workshops in our villages -increasing residents confidence.

- In partnership with the County Council showcased use of locality data to pilot warmer homes programme and linked to GP data ensured that the residents with the greatest needs are made aware of the programme so that they can benefit.

- In total we estimate over the last year that our local Friends Groups have amassed an incredible £120k worth of volunteering hours facilitated by our Locality Enablers.

Improving democratic representation should be a key criterion when deciding on the best LGR option for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The devolution agenda is rooted in giving communities more control over decisions that matter to them and keeping elected members close to their communities is key to this.

A measure of success for this reorganisation will include how effectively it strengthens local democracy and empowers communities. Through the three unitary model, residents will have meaningful opportunities to participate, influence decisions, and help shape the future of their neighbourhoods - building trust, resilience, and pride across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

There are currently 438 elected members in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with 62 at the County Council, 44 at Stoke-on-Trent City Council and 332 across the districts and boroughs. The three unitary model will reduce the number of elected members, and create savings, but still provide a manageable elector-to-member ratio that will allow elected members to stay close to their communities.

Staffordshire County Council underwent a boundary review in 2024. Given the recency of this review, and the need to move at pace to enable LGR, we are proposing to use the county division boundaries as initial building blocks for two new unitary councils in the south of the county. These boundaries are also coterminous with districts as the building blocks of the new authorities. The table on the following page illustrates the current number of county divisions/city wards, the number of county/city elected members, the number of district/borough councillors and the projected electorate by 2029.

South Staffordshire

East Staffordshire

District	County divisions/city wards	Councillors (county/city)	Councillors (district)	Electorate (2029)
South-West unitary				
Cannock Chase District	7	7	36	82,337
South Staffordshire District	8	8	42	88,881
Stafford Borough	9	9	40	108,355
	24	**24**	**118**	**279,573**
South-East unitary				
East Staffordshire Borough	9	9	37	104,022
Lichfield District	8	8	47	91,177
Tamworth Borough	5	5	30	63,166
	22	**22**	**114**	**258,365**
Northern unitary				
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough	9	9	44	99,333
Staffordshire Moorlands District	7	7	56	82,951
Stoke-on-Trent City	34	44	0	185,416
	50	**60**	**100**	**367,700**

To reflect the increased responsibility of the new unitary councils, and the demands upon its members, we propose creating three member wards in the two unitary councils in the South. This proposal ensures that the ratio of members to electors is in line with Boundary Commission guidance and is similar to existing authorities of comparable size.

- **South-West unitary** – 72 councillors, with an elector-to-member ratio of 3,883 (by 2029).
- **South-East unitary** – 66 councillors, with an elector-to-member ratio of 3,915 (by 2029).

The information we have received from Stoke-on-Trent City Council concerning their proposed council size for the Northern unitary states that they will apply Stoke-on-Trent's existing elector to member ration of 4,214 to Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands to calculate council size – as such, they are proposing 22 councillors for Newcastle-under-Lyme and 18 councillors for Staffordshire Moorlands, alongside their existing 44 councillors in Stoke-on-Trent:

- **Northern unitary** – 84 councillors, with an elector-to-member ratio of 4,377 (by 2029).

The information received states that a comprehensive overhaul of current ward boundaries in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands would be necessary, it does not suggest the use of any existing county division or ward boundaries. It also does not offer a recommendation concerning single-member or multi-member wards.

In this submission we recognise that the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) has confirmed it will not be able to conduct a structural review on any authority before it has been vested. Any electoral arrangements will be required to be based on existing ward boundaries (at parish, district or county level) - at least initially. As such, we recommend that the Northern unitary uses Stoke-on-Trent City Council's existing ward boundaries, alongside the county electoral division boundaries in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands. We are also proposing that three-member wards are established in the existing county divisions in the Northern unitary. This would lead to:

- **Northern unitary** – 92 councillors, with an elector-to-member ratio of 3,997 (by 2029)

We recognise there is a small disparity between the elector-to-member ratio in the North, compared to the two unitary councils in the South and that there is likely to be disparity in elector numbers between the existing Stoke-on-Trent City Council ward boundaries and the county electoral divisions. As such, it is likely that

a Boundary Commission review would be required at some point, following implementation of the new structures.

Three new unitary councils will provide better local representation, which was one of the top three priorities identified by the respondents to the survey undertaken; with 63% of respondents listing 'local councillors that listen' as their priority. With the three unitary council model, the elector ratio would be around 3,900 per councillor. This compares favourably to the other options being proposed.

The two unitary model, North/South, is proposing an elector ratio of around 5,800 for the unitary council in the South. Whilst we are yet to see the County Council's methodology for their East/West two unitary model, if we assume they will use a similar methodology to the other two unitary model – e.g. using existing city and county boundaries and creating two-member wards in existing county electoral divisions. This would create the following council sizes:

> **Both councils would also have a significantly higher ratio than our proposed three unitary model.**

- **East unitary** – 102 councillors, with an elector-to-member ratio of 5,164.
- **West unitary** – 66 councillors, with an elector-to-member ratio of 5,741.

We believe both the North/South and East/West two unitary models create a clear democratic deficit. Higher elector-to-member ratios in both alternative two unitary models would inevitably mean local representatives were further from their residents in terms of representation and ability to engage in a meaningful way. It would also mean that each councillor would have an unmanageable workload given the range of functions that they would need to cover in their representative role.

Lead member arrangements will be critical to the three new unitary councils, in particular for Children's Services, Adult Social Care and finance. Whilst there is an argument that having two lead members across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent via a two unitary model would be more 'efficient', we would argue any democratic deficit would not be good enough for our residents and that lead members need to be close to the communities they serve to enable them to be as effective as possible. Prevention and early intervention are key to transforming Children's Services and Adult Social Care and require local councils to embrace community power and understand local needs and opportunities.

As part of the vesting process, a key focus will be to establish a **governance structure** that serves the electorate to an extremely high standard. **Three unitary councils representing the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will provide efficient, focused, locally tailored leadership**. Each council will have capacity to respond more effectively to local challenges and opportunities and provide stronger democratic accountability, allowing service delivery to be cost

effective and streamlined. Savings will be made by reducing the number of councillors and associated governance structures in comparison to the existing 10 councils.

The number of councillors would reduce from the current 438 to around 230 under the three unitary proposal, giving a significant reduction in member allowance and support costs whilst still enabling effective and efficient representation. It is our view that to reduce below this level, as would be required under a two unitary model (to 172 councillors), would have a negative impact on democratic representation that could not be justified by any savings that could potentially be made additional to the three unitary model.

> **Please note that the electorate numbers will change if the plans to allow 16 and 17-year olds to vote at the next general election pass through Parliament.**

South Staffordshire

Implementation - Our plan

Driving **prosperity**,
preserving **identity**

Throughout this proposal, we have evidenced how we plan to transform local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent for the better by establishing three unitary councils that are embedded in their communities; financially stable; support strong, local decision making; and drive growth. They will be ambitious, collaborative and focused on what matters most to our residents and businesses.

We recognise that the creation of new unitary councils and the closing down of existing authorities is a complex undertaking, not without risk. We will take a phased approach, prioritising service continuity for residents in the immediate phase post vesting day, whilst quickly identifying, planning and delivering our transformation ambitions.

The implementation of LGR has six clear phases (tranches), summarised by the graphic below.
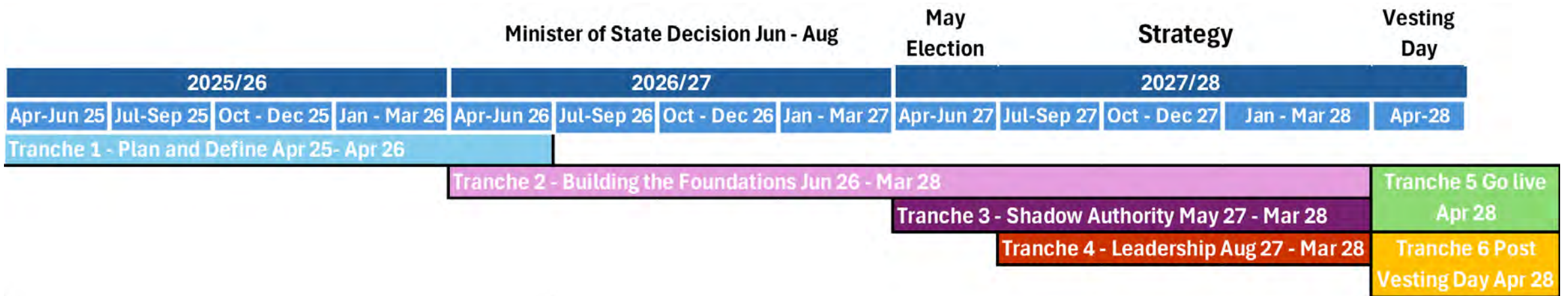
Once a decision is made by the secretary of state on the future structure of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, a **single programme management office (PMO)** will be established. This will bring together in-house expertise, as well as additional dedicated programme management resource, to be funded from government capacity funding and contributions from all councils. The PMO will be established as a joint, cross-authority function for the duration of the transition and implementation. This will ensure appropriate oversight across all existing councils, addressing considerations associated with the formation of the new councils, disaggregation of upper-tier services across the area (when and where applicable), and aggregation of district and borough services to the new unitary councils.

The PMO will provide structure and coherence to planning, governance and delivery activities across the range of thematic workstreams delivered by multi-disciplinary teams assembled from across the councils. The PMO team will provide regular updates and exception reporting as part of effective programme governance, acting in the collective interest of all new unitary councils and providing impartial oversight, coordination, and delivery support throughout the programme.

To ensure robust oversight and clear accountability, the PMO will be accountable to the programme board, comprising senior leaders from all participating authorities, with cross-party and member representation. Roles and responsibilities for board members, PMO leads, and workstream owners will be clearly defined and published. Escalation routes and decision-making authority will be set out in the programme governance handbook.

We will adopt a rigorous programme management approach, with clear milestones, gateway reviews, and independent assurance to keep the programme on track. A comprehensive risk register and mitigation strategy will be maintained and regularly updated, drawing on sector guidance and peer learning from other successful reorganisations.

Formal gateway reviews will be conducted at the end of each tranche, with external assurance provided through peer review, audit, or sector expert input. This approach aligns with CIPFA and LGA guidance and will ensure the programme remains on track, delivers intended benefits, and incorporates best practice from across the sector.

Tamworth

Tranche 1: Plan and define

The focus of this tranche will be **building authorities' individual and collective readiness for LGR**.

Key activities include:

- Prepare and submit the final proposal for LGR to MHCLG.
- Resident and stakeholder engagement to inform the development of the proposal and implementation plan.
- Internal readiness - establish internal mechanisms for ongoing engagement with staff, members and unions. Data capture to inform proposal and implementation plan.
- Joint working and data sharing - to inform the proposal and initial implementation plan, identifying early opportunities for further joint working.
- Programme management - early work to scope out programme governance, structure and resources to enable this to be stood up swiftly in Tranche 2.

Tranche 2: Building the foundations

The focus of this tranche will be to **prepare a robust transition and implementation plan**, following the secretary of state's announcement of which LGR option is to be implemented.

Key activities include:

- Mobilising the PMO, workstreams and programme governance, including joint decision-making arrangements.
- Formal collection of data across all councils and workstreams.
- Develop and agree a detailed transition and implementation plan, with supporting action plans.
- Ramping up work to align and consolidate - where possible - systems, contracts, assets and in-flight change activity.
- Communications and engagement activities with residents, businesses, stakeholders, councillors, staff and unions.

Cannock

Tranche 3: Shadow authority

The focus of this tranche will be to ensure **the three new unitary councils are safe and legal on vesting day**.

Key activities include:

- Establishment of shadow authorities, including election of councillors to the shadow authorities.
- **Appointment of statutory officers for the three new unitary councils**, followed by remaining Tier 1 senior management appointments.
- Interim leadership arrangements will be put in place, including interim chief executives and service continuity teams, to ensure safe and legal operation from day one.
- Escalation protocols for critical services and decision making will be documented.
- Establishment of key governance arrangements for decision making.
- Establishment of key financial arrangements, including treasury management, debt and reserves.

- Setting the MTFS for the first year of the three new unitary councils.
- Management and transition of data and IT systems for vesting day.
- Establishing clear, new brands for each of the three new unitary councils.
- Communications and engagement activities with residents, businesses, stakeholders, councillors, staff and unions.
- A comprehensive day one checklist will be developed, covering statutory appointments, financial systems, IT/data migration, branding, and service continuity.
- Lessons learned from other LGR (e.g. Dorset, Buckinghamshire, and North Yorkshire) will inform day one priorities and risk mitigation.

Tranche 4: Leadership

This tranche will focus on the **recruitment of Tier 2 and Tier 3 leadership** alongside defining the operating model and staffing allocations for vesting day.

Key activities include:

- Recruitment into Tier 2 and Tier 3 leadership positions.
- Define organisation and operating models for the three new unitary councils.
- Detailed service and staff transition planning, including disaggregation and aggregation approach.

Tranche 5: Go live

This tranche will focus on **ensuring the safe and legal delivery of services, the completion of the transition and implementation plan, and the closure of legacy authorities**.

Key activities include:

- Priority will be given to ensuring the safe and legal delivery of services on day one, with the understanding that full integration and subsequent transformation will need to be managed over the first one to two years following vesting day.
- Ensuring continuity of service for all critical services.
- Comprehensive communications and engagement campaign will go live.

Tranche 6: Post vesting day

This tranche will focus on **making our vision for LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent a reality**.

Key activities include:

- Transition to target operating models and consideration of continuous improvement priorities.
- Agree corporate strategies and priorities.
- Adopt and embed a new organisational culture and identity, aligned to the vision for LGR.
- Closedown of legacy councils, including financial accounts and legacy systems.
- Establish ambitious transformation programmes for each of the three unitary councils.
- Service evaluation and co-production.
- Rationalisation, review and consolidation of spend, fees and charges, contracts and assets.

Lichfield District
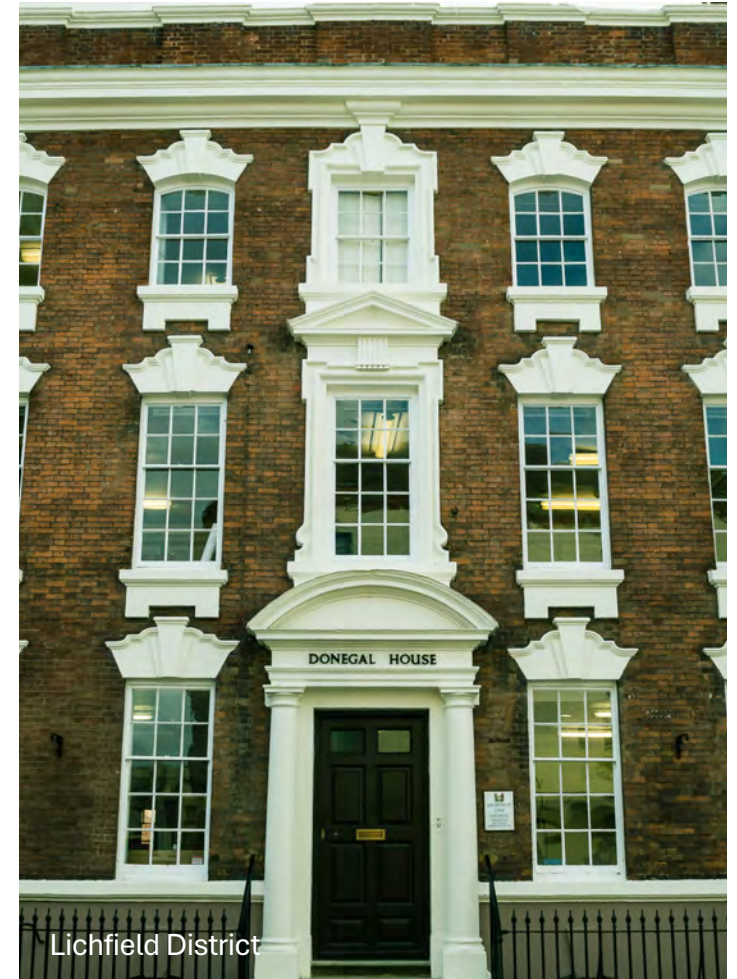
As outlined earlier, we recognise there are **challenges and risks to implementing LGR.** At this early stage, we already have in place a high-level risk register, a summary of which is presented below.

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Disaggregation complexity	Potential for disruption to essential services, leading to a decline in service quality and negative impacts on residents, particularly the most vulnerable.	Develop a critical service continuity plan that incorporates insights from other LGR programmes that have disaggregated services, so that services are safe from day one. Maintain dual systems temporarily where needed and communicate clearly with residents about changes and contact points.
Lack of collaboration across all existing councils	Delays in decision making and implementation, resulting in inefficient resource allocation and duplicated efforts, exacerbated by political disagreements, hindering progress and creating instability that impacts service continuity and resident outcomes.	Already building strong collaborative arrangements and developing 'no regrets activities' that can be delivered as a unified programme. Our programme will be set up efficiently to maintain a strong focus on service delivery in sovereign councils while ensuring the success of the three new unitary councils.
System failure or data loss during migration	Severely disrupt critical council operations, compromise sensitive resident information, and lead to significant financial and reputational damage, ultimately undermining public trust and the effective delivery of services.	Conduct a comprehensive audit of all existing IT systems and data, mapping data flows and dependencies to inform a robust migration plan. Critical systems will undergo rigorous testing, including parallel runs and sandbox environments, to ensure seamless functionality and data integrity before full deployment. A dedicated team will oversee the entire process, implementing stringent cybersecurity protocols and disaster recovery plans to safeguard against potential disruptions and data loss.
Budget overspend or failure to realise savings	Severe financial strain on the new unitary authorities, leading to reduced service provision, reputational damage and financial uncertainty, affecting staff morale.	We will develop a robust Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) with contingency buffers, track savings and costs through a benefits realisation framework, and engage external auditors or financial advisors for independent assurance.
Opposition from residents, councillors, or MPs	Significant erosion of public trust and engagement, leading to reduced participation in local processes and increased community discontent. This can hinder ability to effectively address diverse local needs, weaken community cohesion, and create substantial challenges in implementing policies due to perceived disconnect and resistance.	Our initial engagement demonstrates overwhelming support for smaller unitaries in Southern Staffordshire. Building on our extensive LGR public engagement and consultation, we will develop and implement an ongoing communications and engagement campaign, ensuring transparency and responsiveness throughout the process.
Increase in staff sickness and turnover	Significant impact on staff wellbeing and morale leading to stress and sickness. Likelihood of increased turnover leading to loss of skills, experience, knowledge and talent which will impede the success of the future council.	Continue with ongoing communication and engagement plan with staff and unions to build trust and provide transparency and visibility. We will train and equip leaders and managers with supporting teams through change. Our HR team will work as a strategic partner, mapping critical roles, developing a talent management strategy and our Employee Value Proposition (EVP). Building on existing good practice in district and borough councils, we will develop a belonging and wellbeing strategy to support staff.

The **disaggregation and transition of County Council services, particularly social care**, demands meticulous planning to ensure minimal disruption for residents and continuity of service. Our approach will be to continue our positive collaboration to manage these risks by changing step-by-step incrementally, leveraging economies of scale and scope through shared services - where it makes sense - whilst eliminating waste and directing resources to the frontline service providers locally in our communities. Our key principles for managing this are:

- We will ensure a **seamless and uninterrupted transfer of critical services** from day one by prioritising service continuity. Robust planning and learning from other LGR areas are essential to achieve this. We will ensure that day-one planning takes account of issues such as contact channels, case management systems, and procurement of care packages, for example.

- We understand that **consistency and stability** of placement/worker is a key driver of positive outcomes for vulnerable people. Therefore, we will adopt a pragmatic approach, especially in Children's Services, to maintain consistency of service delivery, even if it initially spans across new administrative boundaries (for example maintaining a lead professional).

- We will, at the right time, review **service models and ways of working** where beneficial, to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness. We will build on good performance and shared partnering arrangements and commissioning (for example with a shared Adults Safeguarding Board for the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent) and we will explore whether these models could work with other elements.

In addition to the phased activities previously outlined, the successful delivery of our implementation plan will be underpinned by several cross-cutting themes. These will ensure that the transition to three new unitary councils is robust, transparent, and delivers lasting benefits for residents, staff, and partners.

Lichfield District

The following principles will be embedded throughout all tranches of the programme:

Success measures and benefits tracking

- We will establish a robust benefits realisation framework, with clear KPIs and regular progress, reporting to all stakeholders.
- Progress will be tracked through quarterly updates, a public dashboard, and annual reviews to ensure transparency and accountability.

Resource and capacity planning

- The programme will be resourced through a mix of secondments, interim appointments, and, where necessary, external expertise.
- We will ensure sufficient capacity and skills are in place at every stage of the transition.

Ongoing stakeholder engagement

- Engagement with staff, unions, partners, and the public will continue throughout implementation.
- The stakeholder engagement plan will be expanded to include regular feedback loops, transparent reporting, and opportunities for co-design.

- Feedback from staff, unions, partners, and the public will be actively sought and used to inform key decisions, with outcomes published via regular updates and a public dashboard.

Learning from others

- We will draw on lessons learned from other successful local government reorganisations, including Suffolk, North Yorkshire, and Surrey, to inform our approach and de-risk implementation.

Critical path and dependencies

- Key dependencies include timely legislation, IT and data migration, and the successful recruitment of senior leadership.
- We will monitor these closely and maintain contingency plans to address any delays or challenges.

South Staffordshire

In summary, the options appraisal demonstrates that the three unitary model is the only option that scores highly against all of government's criteria.

Unlike the alternatives, the three unitary model achieves a fair balance of population size to unlock devolution, reflects economic geographies, and ensures that councils remain close to their communities, enabling responsive, high-quality services and strong local accountability.

The average-sized local authority in England is 275,000, making the proposed three unitary model still on the large side. Locally-focused authorities are better able to understand and respond to the specific needs of their residents, ensuring that services are agile, joined up, and truly reflective of local circumstances.

This approach not only improves outcomes but also builds trust and accountability, as decision making remains close to its communities. Other options, such as a single unitary or two unitary models, either create authorities that are too large and remote to be effective, or group together areas with fundamentally different needs and identities, leading to risks of democratic deficit, poor service responsiveness, and weakened community engagement.

The three unitary model is therefore recommended as the preferred option for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, as it is best placed to deliver the government's ambitions for devolution and sustainable local leadership.

South Staffordshire

Tamworth

Lichfield District

Appendix 1
Options appraisal

Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

This options appraisal provides an evidence-based assessment of the main models for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Using the government's six criteria, each option has been evaluated through a structured scoring framework, informed by quantitative analysis and qualitative evidence. Stakeholder engagement, including feedback from residents, businesses, and partners, has played a critical role in informing the appraisal.

Each criterion is scored on a scale of 1(weakest) to 5 (strongest), with commentary to explain the rationale behind each score. This approach ensures that the assessment is balanced, robust, and able to withstand external scrutiny.

The results are clear: the three-unitary model consistently outperforms all other options across every government-set criterion. It delivers the strongest alignment with the government's requirements, achieving a fair balance of population size, supporting economic geographies, and enabling councils to remain close to their communities. In contrast, the single and two unitary models risk creating authorities that are too large and remote, or that group together areas with fundamentally different needs and identities, potentially undermining local accountability, service quality, and community empowerment.

This robust, comparative assessment demonstrates why the three-unitary model is the best way forward for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, ensuring that local government is both strategic and deeply rooted in place.

MHCLG Criteria	1 Unitary Council	2 Unitary Councils – North/South	2 Unitary Councils – East/West	3 Unitary Councils – North/SE/SW
Single tier of local government covering sensible economic and geographic areas	3	3	2	5
Efficiency, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	3	4	3	4
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	2	3	2	4
Working together to understand local needs	1	3	2	5
Supporting devolution arrangements	1	3	3	5
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	1	3	2	5
Total (out of 30)	**11**	**19**	**14**	**28**

One Unitary Council

The single unitary council option, while not currently proposed by any of the councils in Staffordshire, would create one authority for all of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

While this model could achieve arguably the highest financial savings, it only scores a three for efficiency, improved capacity and withstanding financial shocks as it is very challenging to deliver services efficiently over such a large geography and population.

The total score of 11 out of 30, reflecting that a single large authority would struggle to reflect diverse local identities, would ignore functional economic geographies, could not deliver responsive services, and would not enable effective neighbourhood empowerment.

MHCLG Criteria	Score	Commentary
Single tier of local government covering sensible economic and geographic areas	3	Ignores the different socio-economic geographies that exist within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. It will be challenging to understand or provide cohesive place leadership across such diverse communities to drive forward economic growth and housing.
Efficiency, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	3	Would deliver the highest annual savings and lowest implementation costs. However, it would be highly challenging to deliver efficient, people centred services that improve outcomes across such a large single entity, geographical area and population.
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	2	Whilst this model could provide consistent service standards across the geography it would be very challenging for services to be data driven and preventative in their make-up, or reflect the diverse communities and needs that exist across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in service delivery.
Working together to understand local needs	1	This model would be too large, remote and detached to respond to local needs. It will lack the agility or detailed local knowledge to effectively respond to local needs.
Supporting devolution arrangements	1	This model would make establishing a Mayoral Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent impossible.
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	1	Would be very challenging to implement a successful neighbourhood model across such a large and diverse geography. Highly likely this model would be less responsive to local issues and community voices. Risks community detachment and erosion of trust between citizens and local government. The larger member-to-elector ratio in these models increases the risk of a real democratic deficit, making it harder for residents to access and influence their elected representatives.
Total (out of 30)	**11**	

Two Unitary Councils – North/South

The two unitary councils (North/South) option divides the area into a northern and a much larger southern authority.

This model achieves a total score of 19 out of 30.

It performs better than a single unitary by reflecting the economic geography of the north and south in part, however the geographical size and significant population imbalance in the south makes it challenging to represent local identities, deliver tailored services, and ensure effective community engagement.

It also risks creating a significant imbalance of influence in a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority.

MHCLG Criteria	Score	Commentary
Single tier of local government covering sensible economic and geographic areas	3	Reflects the north Staffordshire economic geography, more than the southern equivalent. Produces two unitary councils of unbalanced population size – 477,500 and 656,800. It will be very challenging in the south to reflect local identities.
Efficiency, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	4	Whilst this option would, in all likelihood, deliver higher annual savings than the three unitary model, and would not face the same level of challenges as the one unitary model regarding delivering efficient services, the size of the unitary in the South will mean similar challenges to a single unitary option remain.
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	3	It will be very challenging for the southern authority, covering a population of 656,800, to not be remote and detached or to reflect the diverse needs of its communities in service delivery.
Working together to understand local needs	3	A large unitary in the south will make it challenging to understand the needs of the diverse communities that exist across the geography. It would serve a geography that has diverse needs, opportunities and challenges.
Supporting devolution arrangements	3	Would support the establishment of a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Mayoral Strategic Authority, however it would have two unitary councils as constituent members with significantly unbalanced population sizes. Could lead to one dominant authority and competition rather than collaboration.
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	3	The larger unitary in the south will find it challenging to implement successful neighbourhood working and to implement effective community engagement approaches. There will be a larger member to elector ratio in the larger unitary in the south risks a real democratic deficit, making it harder for residents to access and influence their elected representatives.
Total (out of 30)	**19**	

Two Unitary Councils – East/West

The two unitary councils (East/West) option splits the area into eastern and western authorities.

With a total score of 14 out of 30, this model lacks a clear rationale for dividing established economic and social geographies, especially between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent and connects the distinctly different economies (north and south) that exist in Staffordshire without explanation.

Crucially, there are huge differences between areas such as Staffordshire Moorlands which would be at one end of the eastern authority and Tamworth which would be at the other end. Grouping these distinct areas together would undermine effective place-based working and make it extremely difficult to deliver high-quality, locally responsive services.

As reflected in the low scores for understanding local needs and neighbourhood empowerment, this model is ultimately unworkable and scores poorly on all criteria apart from efficiency, improved capacity and withstanding financial shocks.

MHCLG Criteria	Score	Commentary
Single tier of local government covering sensible economic and geographic areas	2	Produces two unitary councils of unbalanced population size – 487,794 and 689,784. Clear shared socio-economic issues and opportunities between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent - no clear rationale for placing these areas in different unitary councils. Limited evidence of shared local identities across the two proposed large geographies.
Efficiency, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	3	Whilst this option would, in all likelihood, deliver higher annual savings than the three unitary model, delivering efficient services across two areas with limited shared geography would be extremely challenging.
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	2	Limited evidence of shared local identities across the two proposed geographies which will make delivering high quality services that reflect local needs very challenging. It will be very challenging for the authority in the east, covering a population of 689,784, to reflect the diverse needs of its communities in service delivery.
Working together to understand local needs	2	Limited evidence to suggest there are shared socio-economic geographies across the two proposed areas. A large unitary in the east will make it challenging to understand the needs of the diverse communities that exist across the geography. It would serve a geography that has diverse needs, opportunities and challenges.
Supporting devolution arrangements	3	Would support the establishment of a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Mayoral Strategic Authority, however it would have two unitary councils as constituent members with unbalanced population sizes. Could lead to competition rather than collaboration.
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	2	Limited evidence to suggest there are east/west socio-economic geographies. The larger unitary in the east will make it challenging to implement successful neighbourhood working and to implement effective community engagement approaches. There will be a larger member to elector ratio in the unitary in the east, making visibility and responsiveness more challenging.
Total (out of 30)	**14**	

Three Unitary Councils – North, South-East and South-West

The three unitary councils option establishes separate authorities for North Staffordshire, South-East Staffordshire, and South-West Staffordshire.

This model achieves the **highest total score of 28 out of 30**, reflecting its strong alignment with all government criteria.

It delivers balanced population sizes, supports economic geographies, and enables councils to remain close to their communities.

The three-unitary model is best placed to deliver responsive, high-quality services, strong local leadership, effective devolution, and meaningful community empowerment.

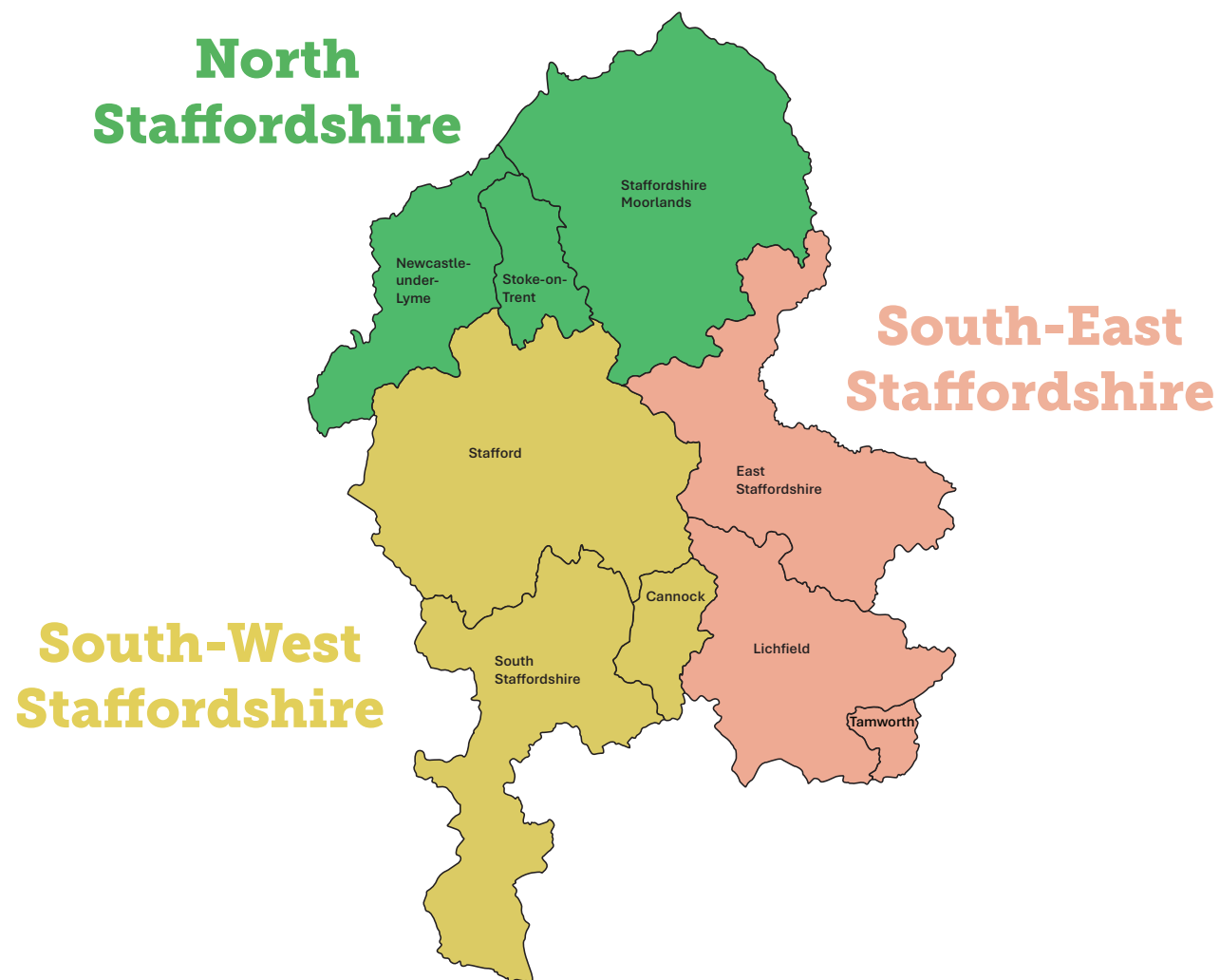| MHCLG Criteria	Score	Commentary
Single tier of local government covering sensible economic and geographic areas	5	Creates three unitary councils who have a more balanced population size. Reflects economic geographies and better reflects the differing local identities than the other options. This model is also best aligned with the government's agenda, supporting targeted investment and reducing regional inequalities by ensuring each council can focus on the unique needs and opportunities of its area.
Efficiency, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks	4	Creating two unitary councils in the South of the county will deliver £15.1m net annual savings and a payback period of under four years. A Northern unitary is estimated to produce a further £21.2m of net annual savings. Whilst this model delivers the lower annual savings, it does still deliver sizeable savings and creates three unitary councils that can withstand financial shocks. This model balances economies of scale with understanding local communities to maximise the efficiency of service delivery.
Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens	4	Three unitary councils will be able to better understand local needs, be more responsible and transform quicker.
Working together to understand local needs	5	Only option that recognises there are diverse local identities across the area, which is important to residents. Councils will be closer to communities to better understand needs and opportunities.
Supporting devolution arrangements	5	Would support the establishment of a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Mayoral Strategic Authority, creating three balanced unitary councils to be constituent members. Three balanced members would be able to better advocate on behalf of local and economic need. Promotes collaboration rather than competition.
Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	5	Keeps decision-making closest to communities out of all the options. More likely that neighbourhood working models and community engagement approaches will be successful due to the unitary councils covering smaller populations and geographies. Lower member to elector ratio to support democratic representation and visibility in communities.
Total (out of 30)	**28**	

In summary, the options appraisal demonstrates that the three unitary model is the only option that scores highly against all of government's criteria.

Unlike the alternatives, the three unitary model achieves a fair balance of population size to unlock devolution, reflects economic geographies, and ensures that councils remain close to their communities, enabling responsive, high-quality services and strong local accountability. The average sized local authority in England is 275,000, making the proposed three unitary model still on the large side.

Locally focused authorities are better able to understand and respond to the specific needs of their residents, ensuring that services are agile, joined-up, and truly reflective of local circumstances. This approach not only improves outcomes but also builds trust and accountability, as decision-making remains close to its communities.

Other options, such as a single unitary or two unitary models, either create authorities that are too large and remote to be effective, or group together areas with fundamentally different needs and identities, leading to risks of democratic deficit, poor service responsiveness, and weakened community engagement.

The three unitary model is therefore recommended as the preferred option for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent as it is best placed to deliver the government's ambitions for devolution and sustainable local leadership.

Appendix 2
Local context

Driving **prosperity**,
preserving **identity**

Understanding the unique local context of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is fundamental to designing effective local government structures.

This appendix provides a summary evidence base that underpins our proposal for three unitary councils, demonstrating why a tailored, place-based approach is essential to deliver the government's criteria for reorganisation and to achieve better outcomes for all residents.

The three proposed unitary areas - South-West Staffordshire, South-East Staffordshire, and North Staffordshire - are each defined by distinct economic profiles, demographic trends, and community identities.

North Staffordshire

South-East Staffordshire

South-West Staffordshire

Staffordshire Moorlands

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Stoke-on-Trent

Stafford

East Staffordshire

Cannock

Lichfield

South Staffordshire

Tamworth
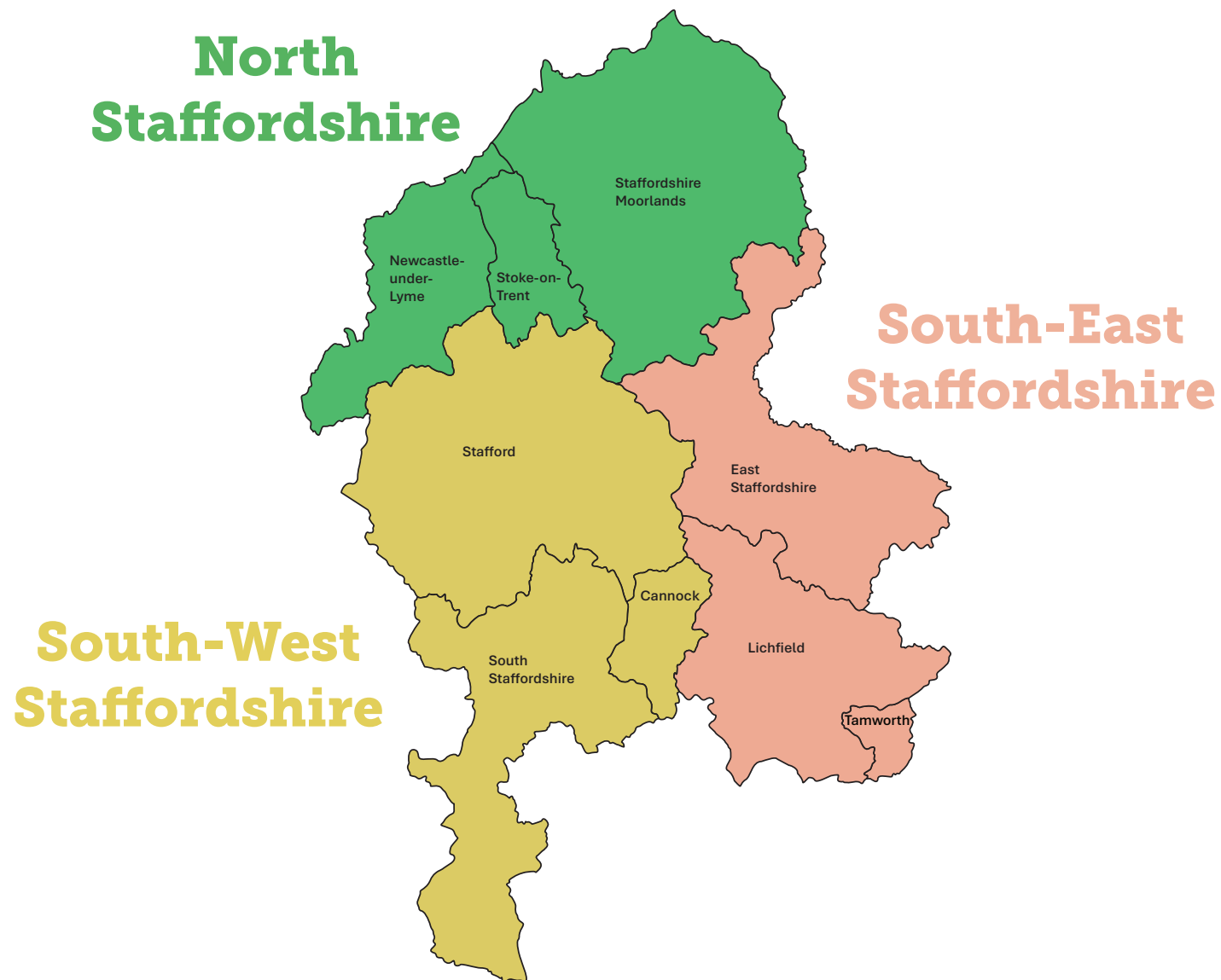
South-West Staffordshire

- A population of **360,067**, projected to rise to **390,457** by 2040.
- Major towns, villages and cities: **Cannock, Rugeley, Hednesford, Brereton, Ravenhill, Stafford, Stone, Eccleshall, Penkridge, Codsall, Wombourne, Great Wyrley, Kinver**.
- Contributes **£8.5 billion** to the economy.
- Home to:
  - **Freightliner Group, a major logistics hub.**
  - **i54 and West Midlands Interchange, creating 8,500 jobs and contributing £430 million locally.**
- Key employment industries include construction, civil engineering, health and social care.
- Key strategic roads include A5, A449, A518, M6, M6 Toll and the M54.
- Railways stations in Stafford, Cannock, and Penkridge connect to the West Coast Main Line.
- Combined annual housing target of 2,013.

- Home to Cannock Chase National Landscape - 38 square miles of forest, trails, and wildlife.
- Key tourism attractions also include Baggeridge Country Park, Weston Park, Stafford Castle, Stafford's Ancient High House, Boscobel House and Shugborough Estate.
- County Hospital - an acute local hospital.
- Home to South Staffordshire College's main campus at Rodbaston, which specialises in land-based studies and high-needs learning programmes.
- Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG), Stafford campus, features a modern Skills and Innovation Centre and offers course for school leavers, adult education and university-level programmes.
- Staffordshire University's Centre for Health Innovation is based in Stafford.

Stafford

Cannock

South
Staffordshire

South-West Staffordshire

Our people

South-West Staffordshire is home to over 360,000 residents, with the population projected to rise to 390,457 by 2040.

Like many parts of the country, South-West Staffordshire has an ageing population, especially in South Staffordshire where 25.6% of residents are 65-plus, compared to the national average of 18.7%.

By 2034, the 85-plus population is projected to grow significantly:

- **Stafford: +51.9%**
- **Cannock Chase: +47.2%**
- **South Staffordshire: +43.6%**

The percentage of people living in the most deprived 20% of areas in England is measured using the Index of Multiple Deprivation, which ranks neighbourhoods based on factors like income, employment, health, and education. The area contains some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country and some of the most affluent. 13.1% of Cannock Chase's population live in the most deprived neighbourhoods nationally, in contrast to 0% of South Staffordshire's population There are also differences in health inequalities, with healthy life expectancy highest in South Staffordshire and lowest in Cannock Chase. South Staffordshire also reports the lowest smoking rate (4.1%) and highest school readiness (73.8%). Most residents rate their health as good or very good, and unpaid care provision is notable.

South Staffordshire leads in GCSE attainment (43.4%) and Stafford has the highest proportion of adults with NVQ Level 4+ (35.1%).

Unemployment and youth unemployment are low across the board and employment rates are high:

- **Cannock Chase: 84.8%**
- **South Staffordshire: 81.3%**
- **Stafford: 76.5%**

Cannock

> **Like many parts of the country, South-West Staffordshire has an ageing population, especially in South Staffordshire where 25.6% of residents are 65-plus, compared to the national average of 18.7%.**

Indicator	Cannock Chase	South Staffordshire	Stafford
Population (mid-2024)	104,088	114,423	141,556
Projected population (2040)	113,285	119,854	157,318
% aged 65+	19.7%	**25.6%**	23.2%
Life expectancy	M: 77.9 yrs F: 81.8 yrs	M: 79.8 yrs F: 83.3 yrs	M: **80.0 yrs** F: **83.9 yrs**
Healthy life expectancy	M: 61.1 yrs F: 62.1 yrs	M: **65.6 yrs** F: **66.3 yrs**	M: 65.5 yrs F: 65.0 yrs
School readiness	66.5%	**73.8%**	70.8%
GCSE attainment (Grade 5+ in English & maths)	33.4%	**43.4%**	40.1%
Employment rate (16-64)	**84.8%**	81.3%	76.5%
Adults with no qualifications	**22.0%**	19.3%	15.8%
Smoking prevalence (18+)	11.2%	**4.1%**	12.3%
Child obesilty (Age 10-11)	**38.2%**	32.9%	36.0%
Depression prevalence (18+)	**16.6%**	11.3%	13.5%
Dementia diagnosis rate (65+)	**77.6%**	66.9%	63.1%
% in most deprived quintile (IMD 2019)	**13.1%**	**0.0%**	5.3%

South-West Staffordshire

Our place

South-West Staffordshire, like the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, has strong local identities and community pride.

Stafford is a focal point for civic life; Cannock Chase is rich in industrial heritage and is home to Cannock Chase National Landscape; whilst South Staffordshire is predominantly rural with 95% of residents recommending it as a place to live. There is a strong cultural offer, including Stafford Castle which offers a varied programme including the Stafford Shakespeare Festival; Weston Park; and Stafford Gatehouse Theatre.

The area has a combined economy worth approximately £8.5 billion, with high start-up and business survival rates. South Staffordshire records the highest start-up rate in the county at 12.2%. Productivity is rising in all districts, and the area supports a diverse mix of sectors including advanced manufacturing, logistics, construction, and professional services.

Shared investment zones like i54 and West Midlands Interchange support thousands of jobs. Major employers include Jaguar Land Rover, Moog, and Eurofins.

The area benefits from strategic transport links including the M6, M54, A5, and West Coast Main Line, connecting it to Birmingham, Manchester, and London. Housing affordability varies - Cannock Chase offers the most affordable (median price £220k, 7× earnings), while South Staffordshire's median price is £306k (8.1× earnings).

> **The area has a combined economy worth approximately £8.5 billion, with high start-up and business survival rates.**

South Staffordshire

	Indicator	Cannock Chase	South Staffordshire	Stafford	South-West Staffordshire
Housing	**Median house price** (2023)	£220,000	£306,000	£246,000	£260k (South Staffs ~ £306k)
	Housing affordability ratio	7.0×	8.1×	6.6×	7–8× (South Staffs ~ 8.1×)
	First-time buyer mortgage sales per 1,000 dwellings (2024)	11.7	7.4	10.0	7-12 (Against national average of 10.5 per 1000)
	Owner-occupancy rate	68%	74.5%	70%	-
	House build targets (current / proposed)	248 / 555	223 / 676	358 / 782	-

	Indicator	Cannock Chase	South Staffordshire	Stafford	Average (median) of all local authorities
Tourism	**Museums** per 100,000 people	1.0	3.6	5.1	4.2
	Engaged with the arts	90%	93%	93%	91%
	Visited a heritage site	56%	69%	69%	67%
	Visited a museum or gallery	31%	37%	38%	42%

	Indicator	Cannock Chase	South Staffordshire	Stafford	South-West Staffordshire
Business & Productivity	**Total GVA** (2022)	£2.4 billion	£2.3 billion	£3.8 billion	Total of £8.5 billion (balanced economy)
	GVA per job	£53.3k	£55.2k	£51.6k	£53k (near UK average)
	Business start-up rate (2023)	8.6%	9.0%	9.7%	9–10% (Stafford highest)
	Five-year business survival	64%	62%	65% (highest in county)	62–65% (Stafford highest)
Employment & Skills	**Employment rate** (2023)	85%	81%	77%	81% (Cannock highest at 85%)
	Unemployment rate (2024)	3.5%	2.8%	2.7%	3% (Stafford lowest)
	Economically active	62.3%	56.7%	59.8%	-
	Economically inactive	37.7%	43.3%	40.2%	-
	Top three industries for residents	1) Constructing & civil engineering 13.3% 2) Retail trade, exc' motor vehicles 12.1% 3) Education 8.2%	1) Constructing & civil engineering 11.8% 2) Education 10.8% 3) Retail trade, exc' motor vehicles 8.7%	1) Human health activities 10.5% 2) Retail trade, exc' motor vehicles 10.0% 3) Education 9.6%	-
	Apprenticeship programme starts ages 16 or above, per 100,000 people (2024)	1,214	1,105	1,011	Compared with an average of 937 in England

South-East Staffordshire

- A population of **322,708**, projected to rise to **353,648** by 2040.

- Major towns, villages and cities: **Lichfield, Burntwood, Fazeley, Burton upon Trent, Uttoxeter, Tamworth.**

- Contributes **£9.5 billion** to the economy.

- Home to:
  - **Staffordshire's biggest employer – JCB**
  - **Molson Coors Brewing Company**
  - **Marstons**
  - **DHL**
  - **Unilever**
  - **Pirelli UK Tyres**

- Key employment industries include healthcare, manufacturing, wholesale and retail, and administration.

- Key strategic roads include A38, A5, A50, and A511, strategically link to the M1, M6, and M42.

- The rail network serves Lichfield, Tamworth and Burton to connect to the West Coast Main Line, offering direct services to most main cities including London, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Liverpool.

- Combined annual housing target of 1,841.

- Home to St George's Park National Football Centre and the National Memorial Arboretum.

- Key tourism attractions include Tamworth Castle, which was built by the Normans and served as the capital of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia; Drayton Manor theme park; Lichfield Cathedral; and the National Forest.

- Queens Hospital - an acute local hospital.

- Home to Lichfield College with its focus on stage and creative industries and Tamworth College offering a wide range of courses and career-focused training.

South-East Staffordshire

Our people

South-East Staffordshire has a combined population of over 322,000 and projected to rise over 353,000 by 2040.

The population profile varies across the districts. Lichfield has the highest proportion of older residents (23.9% aged 65-plus), while East Staffordshire and Tamworth are closer to national averages. East Staffordshire has the highest percentage of children under 16 (19.3%).

All three districts are projected to see significant growth in their 85+ population by 2034, with the following increases:

- **Tamworth by 60.5%**
- **Lichfield by 54.3%**
- **East Staffordshire by 49.4%**

Health outcomes vary across the area. Lichfield has the highest life expectancy (80.5 years for males, 83.4 for females) and healthy life expectancy, outperforming national averages. East Staffordshire has the lowest smoking rate (7.3%), and school readiness is strongest in Lichfield (72.6%), reflecting effective early years support. Tamworth faces challenges, with the highest adult obesity rate (73.8%), child obesity at age 10–11 (39.5%), and depression prevalence (15.1%). Self-harm admissions are also elevated, particularly in Tamworth (198 per 100,000).

According to the latest Sport England Active Lives Survey, which measures levels of sport and physical activity, East Staffordshire (57.5%) and Tamworth (59%) are both below the England average of 61%, while Lichfield (66.9%) is above.

Lichfield District

Similar to health outcomes, education outcomes vary across the area:

- **Lichfield's GCSE attainment (46.5%) and NVQ Level 4+ qualifications (33.6%) are the highest.**
- **Tamworth's GCSE attainment (28.4%) and NVQ Level 4+ (21.9%) are the lowest.**

NEET rates are low, with high employment rates across all existing district areas.

Indicator	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	Tamworth
Population (mid-2024)	129,659	111,932	81,117
Projected population (2040)	143,616	123,903	86,129
% aged 65+	19.1%	23.9%	19.3%
Life expectancy	M: 78.2 yrs F: 82.1 yrs	M: 80.5 yrs F: 83.4 yrs	M: 78.3 yrs F: 82.3 yrs
Healthy life expectancy	M: 63.5 yrs F: 65.3 yrs	M: 65.4 yrs F: 66.6 yrs	M: 62.6 yrs F: 63.0 yrs
School readiness	66.7%	72.6%	67.5%
GCSE attainment (Grade 5+ in English & maths)	41.9%	46.5%	28.4%
Employment rate (16-64)	80.5%	85.3%	83.1%
Adults with no qualifications	20.1%	17.1%	21.8%
Smoking prevalence (18+)	7.3%	8.5%	10.1%
Child obesilty (Age 10-11)	36.9%	33.0%	39.5%
Depression prevalence (18+)	11.9%	13.4%	15.1%
Dementia diagnosis rate (65+)	62.0%	65.8%	64.5%
% in most deprived quintile (IMD 2019)	18.8%	3.8%	19.6%

South-East Staffordshire

Our place

South-East Staffordshire includes the historic market town of Tamworth with its historic castle and nearby Drayton Manor Resort. In East Staffordshire there is a mix of urban and rural areas, with the principal urban centre being Burton upon Trent, dominating the housing and employment sectors, supported by the smaller market town of Uttoxeter. Lichfield District covers 33,130 hectares and comprises two main settlements, Lichfield and Burntwood, along with numerous villages.

Transport and infrastructure are key enablers of growth and connectivity. The West Coast Main Line and CrossCountry routes and the M42/A5/A38 road corridors all give strong road–rail connectivity across the Midlands, to Birmingham, Manchester and London. In addition, local and regional bus services are extensive in urban areas.

As the smallest proposed unitary by geography, South-East Staffordshire is economically dynamic, generating a combined GVA of £9.5 billion. East Staffordshire leads (£4.4bn), driven by Burton's brewing industry and strengthened by JCB's headquarters in nearby Rocester. In terms of productivity, Tamworth has the highest GVA per job in Staffordshire (£64,788), with East Staffordshire close behind (£61,497).

Housing affordability varies: Tamworth and East Staffordshire offer better affordability (£225k and £221k median prices), whereas Lichfield records the highest housing affordability ratio (£334k).

Tamworth

> **As the smallest proposed unitary by geography, South-East Staffordshire is economically dynamic, generating a combined GVA of £9.5 billion.**

	Indicator	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	Tamworth	Total
Housing	**House build targets** Current method / proposed method	417 / 644	289 / 753	123 / 444	829 / 1841
	Median house price (2023)	£221,000	£334,000	£225,000	£260k (Lichfield highest at £334k)
	Housing affordability ratio	7.1×	9.3× (least affordable)	6.5×	7–9× (Lichfield least affordable)
	First-time buyer mortgage sales per 1,000 dwellings (2024)	11.8	10.2	13.9	10-14 (against national average of 10.5 per 1000)

	Indicator	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	Tamworth	Average (median) of all local authorities
Tourism	**Museums** per 100,000 people	3.2	8.1	1.3	4.2
	Engaged with the arts	91%	94%	93%	91%
	Visited a heritage site	67%	75%	64%	67%
	Visited a museum or gallery	32%	39%	28%	42%

	Indicator	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	Tamworth	South-East Staffordshire
Business & Productivity	**Total GVA** (2022)	£4.4 billion	£3.0 billion	£2.1 billion	£9.5 billion (fastest growth)
	GVA per job	£61.5k	£50.6k	£64.8k	£57k (above UK average; Tamworth highest)
	Business start-up rate (2023)	12.1%	9.3%	10.5%	9–12% (East Staffs highest)
	Five-year business survival	61%	59% (lowest in county)	62%	59–62%
Employment & Skills	**Employment rate** (2023)	81%	85%	83%	83% (Lichfield highest at 85%)
	Unemployment rate (2024)	4.0%	2.5%	3.5%	3–4% (East Staffs highest)
	Apprenticeship programme starts ages 16 or above, per 100,000 people (2024)	1,058	1,397	1,050	Average of 1168 compared with an average of 937 in England
	Top three industries for residents (excluding farm-based agriculture)	1) Wholesale and retail trade; repair of vehicles. 2) Manufacturing. 3) Health and social work.	1) Wholesale and retail trade; repair of vehicles. 2) Administrative and support services. 3) Professional, scientific and technical.	1) Wholesale and retail trade; repair of vehicles. 2) Manufacturing. 3) Administrative and support services.	In all three areas, a high percentage are employed in the wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles.

North Staffordshire

- A population of **494,803**, projected to decrease to **490,065** by 2040[1].

- Major towns, villages and cities: **Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Burslem, Tunstall, Longton, Fenton, Newcastle town, Silverdale, Keele, Leek, Biddulph and Cheadle.**

- Contributes **£12 billion** to the economy.

- Home to:
  - **Michelin UK**
  - **Bet365**
  - **Vodafone**
  - **Goodwin PLC**
  - **Emma Bridgewater Factory**
  - **Portmeirion factory**

- Key employment industries include advanced manufacturing, digital tech, creative industries, agriculture, tourism, mining and ceramics.

- Key strategic roads include A50, A500, M6 – forming a 90km strategic corridor vital for freight and business logistics.

- Local services from Kidsgrove, Longport, Stoke, Longton and Blythe Bridge connect to the hub station of Stoke-on-Trent, home to West Coast Main Line with frequent direct services to London and Manchester.

- 43% of UK freight passes through this corridor.

- Combined annual housing target of 2,133.

- Home to Alton Towers Resort a popular theme park and key tourist attraction with over 2 million visitors annually.

- Royal Stoke University Hospital - a major trauma centre.

- Home to Keele University and Staffordshire University, both offering a broad range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

[1]Population in the North is projected to decrease, this is likely due to the 2022 population projections being based on the 2022 Mid-Year Population Estimates.

North Staffordshire

Our people

The population of North Staffordshire is currently projected to experience a small decrease by 2040. Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme have a notably high proportion of older residents 26.8% and 21.3% aged 65+, while Stoke-on-Trent has a younger population, with 20.4% of its population under 16, the highest in the area.

By 2034, the 85+ population is projected to grow significantly and is particularly high in Staffordshire Moorlands:

- **Staffordshire Moorlands: 53.7%**
- **Newcastle-under-Lyme: 42%**
- **Stoke-on-Trent: 39.4%**

Staffordshire Moorlands has the region's lowest smoking rate (1.8%) and highest school readiness (72.6%), reflecting strong public health and early years support. Across the region, most residents report good or very good health, and many provide unpaid care.

According to the latest Sport England Active Lives Survey, which measures levels of sport and physical activity, Newcastle-under-Lyme (59%) and Stoke-on Trent (56.3%) are below the England average of 61%, while Staffordshire Moorlands (67.9%) is well above.

52.8% of Stoke-on-Trent residents live in the most deprived 20% of areas in England, the highest level across the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, it also has the lowest GCSE attainment and adult qualifications in North Staffordshire.

NEET rates (young people not in education, employment or training) are low across all three areas, with Stoke-on-Trent at just 2.9%.

Staffordshire Moorlands

Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme have a notably high proportion of older residents 26.8% and 21.3% aged 65+, while Stoke-on-Trent has a younger population, with 20.4% of its population under 16, the highest in the area.

Indicator	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire Moorlands	Stoke-on-Trent
Population (mid-2024)	127,727	96,651	270,425
Projected population (2040)	128,738	96,817	264,510
% aged 65+	21.3%	26.8%	17.3%
Life expectancy	M: 78.0 yrs F: 82.0 yrs	M: 79.9 yrs F: 83.2 yrs	M: 75.6 yrs F: 79.9 yrs
Healthy life expectancy	M: 62.2 yrs F: 63.5 yrs	M: 64.1 yrs F: 65.3 yrs	M: 57.9 yrs F: 59.2 yrs
School readiness	69.3%	72.6%	63.9%
GCSE attainment (Grade 5+ in English & maths)	33.6%	42.4%	33.0%
Employment rate (16-64)	89.6%	80.9%	75.0%
Adults with no qualifications	20.1%	20.1%	25.9%
Smoking prevalence (18+)	4.6%	1.8%	13.0%
Child obesilty (Age 10-11)	39.0%	36.5%	41.1%
Depression prevalence (18+)	15.7%	15.8%	18.6%
Dementia diagnosis rate (65+)	78.1%	64.7%	90.4%
% in most deprived quintile (IMD 2019)	10.6%	3.2%	52.8%

North Staffordshire

Our place

Stoke-on-Trent is the hub station of North Staffordshire's passenger train service - with approximately 2.5 million passengers each year, providing frequent direct services to London and Manchester via a branch of the West Coast Main Line, as well as Crewe, Derby and Nottingham via the East Midlands Railway.

The A50/A500 90km corridor represents a hugely important supply chain and distribution artery for businesses along the east-west axis linking the North West to the East and West Midlands.

Cultural and heritage attractions in North Staffordshire are diverse and include the Regent Theatre, World of Wedgewood and Alton Towers.

North Staffordshire is the largest proposed unitary area, generating a combined GVA of £12 billion. Stoke-on-Trent anchors the economy (£6 - 7.5bn), supported by Newcastle-under-Lyme (£2.7bn) and Staffordshire

Moorlands (£1.9bn). The region blends industrial heritage ceramics, engineering, and advanced manufacturing with innovation and education hubs like Keele University and the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone. Tourism also plays a key role, with Alton Towers and the Peak District boosting visitor numbers. The World of Wedgewood has an important role in the visitor economy along with the Trentham Estate, both situated to the south of Stoke-on-Trent.

Business survival rates are high (up to 64%).

Employment is strong across the board:

- **Newcastle-under-Lyme - 90%**
- **Moorlands - 81%**
- **Stoke-on-Trent - 76%**

Housing affordability is high in Stoke-on-Trent, where the median house price is just £163,574. The area also claims one of the region's best price-to-earnings ratios at 5.5×.

Stoke-on-Trent

The region blends industrial heritage ceramics, engineering, and advanced manufacturing with innovation and education hubs like Keele University and the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone.

	Indicator	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire Moorlands	Stoke-on-Trent	Total
Housing	**House build targets** Current / proposed	330 / 593	159 / 497	704 / 1043	1193 / 2133
	Median house price (2023)	£212,000	£243,000	£156,000	£200k (most affordable; Stoke-on-Trent ~£156k)
	Housing affordability ratio	6.5×	6.6×	5.6×	6× income (best affordability)
	First-time buyer mortgage sales per 1,000 dwellings (2024)	11.9	8.6	10.6	9-12 (against national average of 10.5 per 1000)

	Indicator	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire Moorlands	Stoke-on-Trent	Average (median) of all local authorities
Tourism	**Museums** per 100,000 people	4.1	9.4	3.5	4.2
	Engaged with the arts	90%	92%	86%	91%
	Visited a heritage site	61%	64%	51%	67%
	Visited a museum or gallery	42%	40%	33%	42%

	Indicator	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire Moorlands	Stoke-on-Trent	North Staffordshire (Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands)
Business & Productivity	**Total GVA** (2022)	£2.7 billion	£1.9 billion	£7.5 billion	£12 billion (largest economy)
	GVA per job	£52.9k	£44.6k (lowest in county)	£50k (low productivity)	£50k (below UK average)
	Business start-up rate (2023)	10.2%	8.8%	11.8%	9–12% (Stoke-on-Trent highest)
	Five-year business survival	60%	64%	60% (est.)	60–64%
Employment & Skills	**Employment rate** (2023)	81%	85%	83%	83% (Lichfield highest at 85%)
	Unemployment rate (2024)	4.0%	2.5%	3.5%	3–4% (East Staffs highest)
	Apprenticeship programme starts ages 16 or above, per 100,000 people (2024)	1,058	1,397	1,050	Average of 1168 compared with an average of 937 in England
	Top three industries for residents (excluding farm-based agriculture)	1) Wholesale and retail trade; repair of vehicles. 2) Education. 3) Health and social work activities.	1) Manufacturing. 2) Wholesale and retail trade; repair of vehicles. 3) Accommodation and food service activities.	1) Health and social work activities. 2) Wholesale and retail trade; repair of vehicles. 3) Manufacturing.	In all three areas, a high percentage are employed in the wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles.

Appendix 3
Financial modelling methodology and technical appendices

Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

The financial analysis for the two unitary councils in the South of the county, followed a consistent, structured methodology, grounded in learning from other LGR processes and aligned with government guidance. The steps included:

1. Scoping and agreement of method

- Worked with local finance teams to define scope, financial principles, and data needs.
- Agreed on the options to be modelled and the treatment of shared services and disaggregation.

2. Data collection and validation

- Issued standardised data requests to all involved councils, covering revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets, and key service metrics.
- Gathered contextual and narrative information to understand pressures, risks, and transformation plans.
- Held follow-up meetings with finance officers to verify data accuracy, reconcile discrepancies, and align on inputs.

3. Baseline construction

- Built a consolidated financial baseline, combining district, unitary and county budgets into unified figures based on agreed assumptions (e.g., population apportionment).

4. Savings estimation

- Applied standardised top-down models to estimate savings across key categories:
  - Senior management and democratic structures
  - Corporate and back-office services
  - ICT rationalisation and systems integration
  - Estates and asset rationalisation
  - Procurement and contract consolidation
  - Service transformation and demand management (where credible)
- Incorporated both direct (cashable) and enabling (efficiency) savings.
- Used a combination of local inputs and benchmark data from other local government reorganisation programmes to calibrate assumptions.

5. Implementation and disaggregation cost estimation

- Identified one-off costs required to deliver the reorganisation, including:
  - Programme management and transition team costs
  - Redundancy and pension strain
  - ICT integration or separation
  - Property and rebranding
  - Legal and governance setup
- Included disaggregation costs such as:
  - Splitting finance or HR systems
  - Creating new organisational infrastructures
  - Establishing democratic and corporate capacity
- Costs were phased over a six-year period, with timing aligned to implementation logic.

6. Scenario modelling

- Developed a structured financial model that calculates, for each scenario:
  - Annual and cumulative savings
  - Phased implementation costs
  - Year-on-year net benefit
  - Breakeven year
  - Total 10-year net financial benefit

Items considered in the financial case

The financial analysis integrates a wide range of inputs and assumptions, grouped into three main elements:

- **Recurring savings:** Cashable savings expected once reorganisation is complete and steady state is reached. These cover workforce reductions, systems rationalisation, contract management, and operating model changes. Savings are categorised by source, with baselines derived from current budgets.

- **Implementation costs:** One-off costs required to implement the preferred options, typically incurred over the first two to three years. Includes programme delivery, ICT, staff redundancy, estates changes, and transitional double running.

- **Disaggregation costs:** Disaggregation costs reflect the additional effort, complexity, and duplication required to split shared systems and functions across new unitary authorities.

Scenario-based modelling approach

Recognising the inherent uncertainty in savings realisation and implementation cost delivery, the analysis uses the midpoint financial scenarios to establish the likely outcomes:

Scenario	Description
Worst case	A conservative scenario reflecting lower-end savings assumptions and higher delivery costs. Reflects cautious change with limited transformation ambition.
Mid case	The most likely scenario based on agreed central assumptions. Balances prudent savings estimates with realistic implementation ambition, aligned to local capability.
Best case	A more ambitious but achievable scenario, assuming bolder service transformation, more aggressive rationalisation, and faster delivery. Also assumes more investment in digital and commercial capacity.

Each scenario uses the same methodology but varies assumptions across:

- % savings by category
- One-off cost estimates
- Degree of service transformation

This enables the financial case to:

- Demonstrate the robustness of the evaluated options under different delivery environments.
- Quantify the risk and upside potential of reorganisation.
- Support stakeholder discussions on ambition vs feasibility.

Methodology and assumption log

The phased model has been prepared in three sections – assumptions, calculations and outputs. The outputs include the calculation of payback period, individual year impact of LGR and a cumulative impact of LGR. The model is based on the following three key assumptions:

1. **Savings**
2. **One-off implementation costs**
3. **Disaggregation costs**

The phased model projects the above across thirteen years, including three pre-implementation years (Base Year, Year -1 and Shadow Year) and 10 post-implementation years.

The model is, however, based on 2025/26 prices and does not include any adjustment for future inflation for both costs as well as savings. The phased model also does not include the impact of any council tax harmonisation due to uncertainty of implementation.

The inputs as well as outputs have been prepared and validated with Section 151 officers. These reflect the best estimates as of the writing of this case.

Savings assumptions

The overall savings assumptions have been prepared using a mix of top down and bottom-up savings approaches, as outlined below.

Top-down approach:

The overall savings assumptions have been calculated based on the outlined savings of unitary authorities, as outlined within previous local government reorganisation documentation. These included 14 previous cases for change across England, ranging from cases submitted between 2009 and 2023. The data included worst-case and best-case savings.

For each individual previous case, an average savings per population base was calculated for worst- and best-case savings, with the average of these reflecting the mid-case savings. These were subsequently indexed up from the relevant transition year (per the previous case for change) to April 2025 prices. A simple arithmetic average of indexed savings per population base informed the overall average indexed saving per population, which was used to calculate the total 'top-down' savings. The savings were reduced by 5%

to reflect the implementation of two unitary councils in the south, alongside additional adjustments (see details on the following page).

The top-down savings were split into underlying savings categories (as reflected in table on following page) using a percentage allocation mix (see 'initial % of total savings' column on following page) based on internal discussions and experience. Once the savings amounts for each category were calculated, additional adjustments were made based on internal discussions and experience. This resulted in the 'final % of total savings' column on the following page).

East Staffordshire

Saving name	Description	Rationale and assumptions	Initial % of total savings	Final % of total savings
Optimising leadership	Reviewing the number of managerial roles to eliminate duplication and enhance operational efficiency, by merging similar responsibilities into fewer and more impactful positions.	Assumes a single senior leadership team for each new unitary replaces multiple councils' executives (Chief Execs, Directors, S151s, Monitoring Officers). Assumes no significant delays from legal/TUPE or governance negotiations.	6%	5%
Right sizing of the organisation	Determining the right size of the organisation, proportionate to the services that are being delivered, offset by the costs of new technology and upskilling individuals. Reducing overall workforce through role consolidation and automation.	Assumes c. 3% of workforce (primarily back-office/admin roles) reduced through consolidation, automation and voluntary redundancy. Realisation depends on culture change, system integration and union engagement.	30%	25%
Centralising corporate services	Consolidating back-office functions, such as human resources (HR), finance and information technology (IT) to streamline operations, enhance efficiencies and unlock savings.	Merger of finance, HR, payroll, legal, and communications into centralised functions for each new unitary. Requires effective digital systems, unified policies and process harmonisation.	6%	5%
Service contract consolidation	Understanding current and joint service arrangements between councils, and what savings (or costs) may be incurred on consolidation. Determining the optimum sourcing arrangements for contracts that are either currently outsourced or could be outsourced. This will need to consider both financial and operational efficiency and will consider existing arrangements with third parties.	Assumes merging of contracts (waste, highways, care) and renegotiation over time. Dependent on contract cycles, procurement capacity and provider co-operation.	35%	41%
Proportionate democratic services	Reviewing the costs of democratic services (elections, committee support, etc.) to be proportionate to the new authorities. Reducing the number of councillors and governance costs (e.g. committees, elections).	Assumes reduction in number of councillors and associated committee and democratic support costs. Assumes new governance models implemented immediately post-reorganisation.	5%	4%

Saving name	Description	Rationale and assumptions	Initial % of total savings	Final % of total savings
Improved digital & IT systems	Implementing unified digital platforms, automating repetitive tasks, streamlining workflows, and eliminating manual processes, can lead to significant time and cost savings. Unified platforms and systems rationalisation reduce licensing, support, and admin overheads.	Streamlining systems and licenses, introducing self-service platforms, rationalising IT estate. Dependent on investment in digital infrastructure and culture shift to online services.	3%	3%
Asset & property optimisation	Reviewing property portfolio to ensure alignment with the council's overall objectives and community needs.	Release of surplus office space, lease terminations, or revenue from letting/disposals. Contingent on lease terms, capital receipt strategy and local market conditions.	5%	6%
Customer engagement	Enhancing customer contact facilities, determining the needs of citizens in the new authorities and developing proportionate customer contact centres, where appropriate including self-service through digital channels, to improve customer engagement, satisfaction and drive operational efficiencies and cost savings.	Channel shift to digital, contact centre consolidation, and automation of transactions. Assumes digital access for residents, workforce reskilling, and strong communications.	2%	2%
Consolidating fleets & optimising routes	Exploring consolidation of fleets and any route efficiencies, to reduce costs and minimise environmental impact. Reducing fleet size and improving vehicle routing to lower transport costs.	Integration of transport assets across services (e.g. waste, social care, facilities). Benefits depend on fleet management tools, depot locations and service redesign.	8%	9%
Total			**100%**	**100%**

Savings by category, as calculated from the top-down approach, was subsequently compared with the savings calculated using the bottom-up approach.

Bottom-up approach:

To estimate the potential savings using the bottom-up approach, an overall spend against each of the savings categories (as per above table) was identified and a corresponding high-level saving against spend (in percentage terms) was made against each of the categories.

The total savings were then aligned across the bottom-up and top-down approaches to ensure a realistic savings assumption by category. The savings were then allocated to individual unitary authorities, based on the authority's share of total population.

No savings from LGR have been assumed to be realised in the Base Year and the Shadow Year. However, they start to ramp up in Year 1 and build up to be fully realised per annum by Year 3. The savings have then been phased based on expected realisation as per the table:

	Shadow year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Optimising leadership	-	50%	50%	-
Right sizing of the organisation	-	30%	40%	30%
Centralising corporate services	-	20%	40%	40%
Service contract consolidation	-	45%	35%	20%
Proportionate democratic services	-	80%	20%	-
Improved digital & IT systems	-	15%	35%	50%
Asset & property optimisation	-	40%	40%	20%
Customer engagement	-	33%	33%	33%
Consolidating fleets & optimising routes	-	30%	40%	30%

Implementation cost breakdown

The overall implementation cost assumptions have been prepared using a top-down approach only, based on the implementation costs as outlined within previous Case for Change documentation. These included the same previous cases for change used to inform the top-down savings assumptions, to ensure consistency. The data included worst case and best case implementation costs.

These were calculated as one-off implementation costs and disaggregation costs.

Cannock
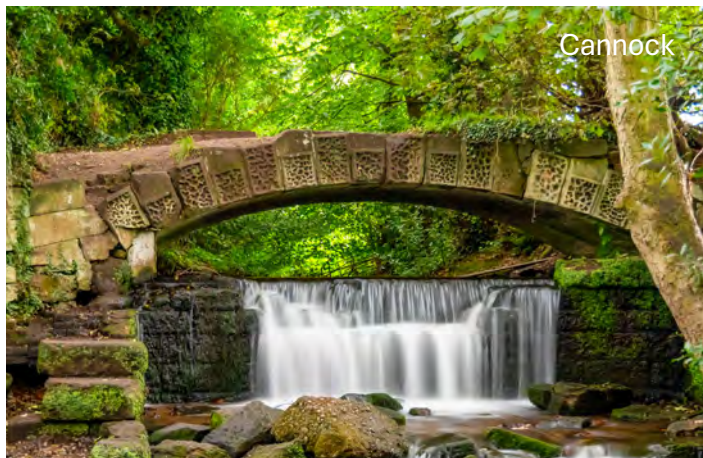
One-off implementation costs:

For each individual previous case, an average one-off implementation cost per population base was calculated for both the worst case and best case, with the average of the two informing the mid case. These were subsequently indexed up from the relevant transition year (per the previous case for change) to April 2025 prices. A simple arithmetic average of indexed one-off implementation cost per population base informed the overall average indexed one-off implementation per population.

These were subsequently adjusted for an increase of £5.9 million to reflect that there will be a total of three new unitary authorities and that each new authority requires its own set-up processes, including establishing governance structures, IT systems, and administrative frameworks, leading to higher cumulative transition costs.

The final figure was then apportioned across the cost categories, underpinning the one-off implementation costs (see table on following page).

Stafford

Tamworth

Category	Description	Rationale and assumptions	% of total costs
Workforce: Exit	Compensation paid to employees as a result of restructuring/redundancies, including redundancy payments, pension strain, TUPE, salary harmonisation, and other contract termination fees.	Redundancy and termination costs reflect staff length of service.	35%
Workforce: Development	Additional costs to upskill and reskill employees to adapt to new roles and responsibilities.	Cost allowed for retraining through redeployment of workforce.	5%
Transition: Team	Implementation programme team including legal, contract negotiation, project and programme management, and specialist support.	A significant transition team required for each unitary authority. Includes legal, HR, project support, public consultation. Some benchmarks include change management and creation of new councils.	11%
Transition: Culture and communications	Costs to develop communications, branding, training, and public information in relation to new authorities. This should inform the public, stakeholders, and employees of proposed changes and address concerns.	Cost allowed for other culture and communications change. Includes all rebranding, change, and engagement.	4%
Transition: Processes	Work required to harmonise processes and facilitate effective service transition. This includes specific constitutional changes and developments, democratic transition, and new policies and procedures.	Cost allowed for efforts to harmonise processes and procedures as part of the transition.	6%
Consolidation: Systems	Alignment of systems and digital infrastructure, including merging systems, data migration, commonality of cyber security, and training for new systems.	Costs reflect previous examples of system implementation. Some benchmarks do not include allowance for ERP and data migration, cleansing and interface development.	21%
Consolidation: Estates and facilities	Reconfiguration of buildings, costs of disposal, and termination fees on leases.	Some benchmarks do not include capital receipts, which can be used to fund, for example transformation or regeneration.	10%
Contingency	Additional 10% contingency to allow for prudence in estimates.	Standard across cases to build out contingency.	10%
Total			**100%**

One-off implementation costs have been assumed to start ramping-up from Base Year and build up by Year Three. These have then been phased as per the below table:

	Base year	Year -1	Shadow year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Workforce: Exit	-	-	10%	20%	30%	40%
Workforce: Development	-	-	40%	40%	20%	-
Transition: Team	-	50%	40%	10%	-	-
Transition: Culture and communications	-	50%	40%	10%	-	-
Transition: Processes	-	50%	40%	10%	-	-
Consolidation: Systems	-	20%	60%	20%	-	-
Consolidation: Estates and facilities	-	-	15%	35%	50%	-
Contingency	5%	15%	20%	20%	20%	20%

South Staffordshire

Disaggregation costs

The disaggregation costs have been assumed due to the additional costs of providing Adult Social Care Services, Children Social Care Services, Place Services and Corporate & Support Services, resulting from the disaggregation of County's services. These have been quantified based on a percentage of the County's 2025/26 budget spend against each service (summarised in table opposite).

The high-level percentages assumed and rationale for the disaggregation costs across the services are outlined in the table opposite.

These disaggregation costs are assumed to be validated for the mid case, while the worst case assumes these to be 10% higher than mid case. These costs have been allocated to the individual unitaries based on the share of population within the new unitaries, excluding the population of existing upper tier authorities.

These costs are all assumed to be reflected 100% from Year 1 of the implementation, without any ramp up.

Cost category	Rationale and assumptions	Calculation method
Adult Social Care inefficiencies	Management: Assumes additional DASSs and ADs, head of legal roles. ICT & systems: Requires data segregation, integrations, separate instances and eventually separate case management systems. Performance & strategy: Additional statutory reporting and strategic development.	+0.9% of budget
Children's Services inefficiencies	Management: Requires additional DCSs and other new roles required. ICT & systems: Requires data segregation, integrations, separate instances and eventually separate case management systems. Performance & strategy: Additional statutory reporting and strategic development.	+0.1% of budget
GF Education Services	Management: Requires additional ADs and other roles required. ICT & systems: Requires data segregation, integrations, separate instances and eventually separate case management systems.	+0.3% of budget
Public Health	Management: Assumes additional Assistant Director roles. ICT & systems: Requires data segregation, integrations, separate instances and eventually separate case management systems. Performance & strategy: Additional statutory reporting and strategic development.	+1.5% of budget
Central & support services to the council duplication	Management: Small increase in management roles. Staff: Increase in finance, HR, legal and policy, ICT/digital and performance roles. ICT costs: Requires data segregation and integrations.	+2.1% of budget

Other considerations

Impact of Fair Funding 2.0 and the business rate reset on gross budget gap

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils (including County) will manage their ongoing gross budget gaps regardless of local government reorganisation. The forecasted total gross budget gap for all councils by 2028/29 of £40.9m (including the County Council of £24.2m), has therefore not been included within the breakeven analysis of transformation. However, there is recognition that Fair Funding 2.0 and the business rate reset may have a significant impact on councils' financial positions from 2026/27.

The table below outlines the anticipated impact of Fair Funding 2.0 and the business rates reset in the year 2028/29 provided by each authority based on the financial projections of local government funding experts LG Futures:

FY28/29, £m	Gross Budget Gap	Fair Funding Impact (FF)	Gross Budget Gap after FF
Mid and South Staffordshire	16.7	-0.5	16.2
Staffordshire County	24.2	0.4	24.6
Total	**40.9**	**-0.1**	**40.8**

Dedicated Schools Grants

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils will manage their Dedicated Schools Grants (DSG) positions regardless of local government reorganisation, therefore DSG surplus or deficits (if any) have not been included within the breakeven analysis of transformation. It will be the decision of each new authority to determine how to use its resources to fund the cost of reorganisation against any funding pressures observed from DSG.

Lichfield District

Appendix 4
Letters of support - MPs and Stakeholders

Driving **prosperity**,
preserving **identity**

RT. HON. SIR GAVIN WILLIAMSON CBE MP

Member of Parliament for Stone, Great Wyrley and Penkridge
Haling Dene Centre, Cannock Road,
Penkridge, Staffordshire, ST19 5DT
Telephone: 01785 847027

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing regarding the proposals for the reorganisation of local government in Staffordshire, and to place on record my support for the creation of three unitary councils, covering the North, South-West and South-East of the county, should reorganisation proceed.

I have consistently expressed reservations about the need for such change and believe that the existing two-tier system works well for Staffordshire. However, if reorganisation is to proceed, I believe the proposal for three unitary authorities provides the most balanced, community-focused and sustainable way forward.

This structure would allow services to be delivered while maintaining meaningful local identity. The proposed South-West unitary, encompassing South Staffordshire, Stafford and Cannock Chase - and therefore the communities I represent - would reflect shared economic links, transport corridors, and rural character. It would ensure that local decisions continue to be made by those who know and understand the distinct needs of our towns and villages, from Stone and Penkridge to Great Wyrley and the surrounding parishes.

A three-unitary arrangement would preserve the strong community connections that our residents so dearly value. It would prevent the creation of an overly large and remote authority, ensuring instead that residents retain easy access to their local representatives. Importantly, it would also allow councils to focus locally on investing in infrastructure, supporting small businesses, and maintaining high-quality local services.

For these reasons, while I remain cautious about the overall reorganisation process, I am convinced that if change is to take place, the three-unitary model offers the most proportionate, locally responsive and future-proof solution for Staffordshire. It respects the historic and community boundaries of our county, ensures that existing boroughs and districts are not split across multiple authorities, strengthens local democracy, and keeps decision-making close to the people it affects.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Sir Gavin Williamson CBE MP

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR STONE, GREAT WYRLEY AND PENKRIDGE

Office of Mike Wood MP
High Street
Wombourne
WV5 9DN

Councillor Kathleen Perry MBE
Leader of the Council
South Staffordshire Council
Codsall
South Staffordshire
WV8 1PX

23 October 2025

Dear Councillor Perry,

RE: Support for South Staffordshire Council's Proposed restructure of Local Government in Staffordshire

I am writing to place on record my full support for South Staffordshire Council's proposal concerning the reorganisation of local government in Staffordshire.

In my view, the Council's proposal for two unitary authorities in the south of the county, complemented by one in the north, offers the most effective and proportionate model for delivering efficient local government while safeguarding the interests of residents across South Staffordshire.

Staffordshire is a county rich in character and heritage, distinguished by its strong sense of identity across each of its regions. From the proud culinary traditions of Staffordshire oatcakes in the north to the 'orange' battered chips of the south, the county's diversity of culture and community life is something to be celebrated. It is precisely this sense of individuality and regional distinction that strengthens the case for Staffordshire to be considered an exception to the Government's indicative model of unitary authorities serving populations of around 500,000 residents.

The proposal advanced by South Staffordshire Council strikes the appropriate balance between scale and locality, ensuring that the new authorities are of sufficient size to operate efficiently and deliver value for money, whilst remaining close enough to the people they serve to preserve a genuine sense of community and identity.

I am conscious that this proposal has been developed with care and diligence, drawing upon the extensive experience of councillors and officers who have served their communities with distinction over many years. I am therefore confident that the Council's submission reflects both sound judgement and a deep understanding of the needs and aspirations of local residents.

I would like to thank you and your colleagues for your continued leadership and for ensuring that the voices of South Staffordshire's residents remain central to this important process of local government reform.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Wood
Member of Parliament for Kingswinford & South Staffordshire

Sarah Edwards MP
Member of Parliament for Tamworth
House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA
Email: sarah.edwards.mp@parliament.uk

Alison McGovern MP
Minister of State (Minister for Local Government and Homelessness)
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF
United Kingdom

Tuesday 29th October

Dear Minister of State,

We are writing to you jointly to support the proposal to form a new authority in South-East Staffordshire comprised of the current districts of East Staffordshire, Lichfield and Tamworth. This proposal also has the support of three-quarters of local residents.

This new authority would represent a strong coherent voice for the residents it would represent as the functioning economic geography is the same. All three authorities are on the northern rim of the West Midlands Combined Authority. All form part of the Birmingham travel to work area and the wider area in which the Combined Authority's housing needs are being met. This means that all three are continuing to grow in population. All three authorities were part of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP, until forced to move to the now-defunct Staffordshire LEP by the previous government. Whilst retaining key individual characteristics, all three authorities have significant manufacturing and logistics sectors. The proposal also matches the area covered as a policing area within Staffordshire Police.

There is strong evidence from the public consultation that whilst residents might prefer no change, they prefer smaller local authorities to larger ones. This is why we are supporting a proposal to create two authorities from the six current districts in southern Staffordshire. We would respectfully draw your attention to the particular issues involved in reorganising shire counties. The major centres of population have strong identities and it is therefore difficult to persuade residents that their current doorstep authority should be replaced by a distant one. Burton-upon-Trent and Tamworth both have football teams, playing in League 1 and the National League respectively. Lichfield is a cathedral city whose bishop sits in the House of Lords, and Burntwood, like Tamworth, has a proud history of mining. These, and other individual claims to fame, make the local sense of identity a key issue which needs to be handled with great care. Lichfield and Tamworth already operate a joint waste management service demonstrating that the necessary commitment to joint working exists already.

The current review of Local Government has respected the County boundary. Therefore, the solutions put forward have had to fall within it. The Reform-led County Council have proposed an "East-West" split which has succeeded only in uniting everyone else in condemning it as ridiculous and their only defence has been that it was what the consultants thought. They have since advertised posts for political advisors, which seems to confirm that their proposal was naïve and out of touch. The proposed

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authority for the north of the County has proved controversial because the issues in Stoke have led to concerns that resources will be sucked out of the surrounding areas. We feel sure that Ministers will ensure the appropriate safeguards are put in place to reassure residents.

Therefore, we are asking you to approve the proposal for three new authorities in Staffordshire with one of those consisting of Tamworth, Lichfield and East Staffordshire because it meets the government's commitment to re-organise local government whilst respecting the sense of identity and functioning economic geography of those whom we have the honour to represent.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Edwards MP
Member of Parliament for Tamworth

Dave Robertson MP
Member of Parliament for Lichfield

District Council House
Frog Lane
Lichfield
Staffordshire
WS13 6YU

22 October 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

We write to offer the full and unequivocal support of the Lichfield Chamber of Trade and Commerce for the local government reorganisation proposal to create three unitary councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

As an organisation deeply embedded in the local economy, we recognise that the success of our businesses and the prosperity of our area are directly tied to an effective, responsive, and locally-focused local government. We firmly believe this three-unitary model, which includes the proposed South-East Staffordshire Unitary Authority (comprising East Staffordshire, Lichfield, and Tamworth) is the best option to meet the diverse needs of our residents and businesses.

Supporting Business and Economic Growth

The business community in and around Lichfield benefits immensely from the close, responsive relationship we have forged with Lichfield District Council. This proposal is critical to preserving the 'local' in local government, ensuring our distinct functional economic area and community identity are protected and enhanced.

- **Tailored Economic Strategy:** The three-unitary model aligns governance with well-defined functional economic geographies, empowering each new authority to drive growth tailored to the unique strengths and opportunities of its area. For Lichfield, this means focused support for our specific mix of retail, professional services, and industrial sectors.

- **Responsive Local Relationships:** The proposal explicitly states that the three-unitary model will enable the development of close, responsive relationships with businesses, which we know "bears fruit" in a way that can only be achieved at a local level. Losing this crucial local connection through a much larger, more distant unitary authority would pose a significant risk to the current momentum of economic regeneration.

- I**nfrastructure and Investment:** A local focus ensures targeted investment in infrastructure and regeneration. The new South-East Staffordshire authority

will have the in-depth, local knowledge vital for managing infrastructure needs and delivering ambitious housing targets sympathetic to existing communities and protecting green belt land.

- **Unlocking Devolution:** The creation of three balanced unitary councils will unlock devolution and create the necessary economic footprint for a Mayoral Strategic Authority, ensuring that the new Mayor receives a more representative and importantly 'local' view of business needs across the county.

Efficiency and Local Accountability

We recognise the financial challenges facing local government, with spiralling costs in social care and increasing homelessness pressures. The proposal demonstrates a clear path to both financial sustainability and improved service delivery through a commitment to localism.

- **Financial Sustainability:** The proposal has been independently validated, demonstrating estimated recurring annual net savings totalling £15.1 million by Year 3 compared to the current two-tier system, all while keeping decision-making close to communities.

- **Improved Planning and Services:** Having unitary councils focused on their local area is vital for effective planning, ensuring local knowledge informs decisions on housing growth and infrastructure. This approach will also allow for the localisation of people services (Adult and Children's Social Care), which is projected to unlock an additional £22 million in annual savings by focusing on prevention and early help.

- **Community Trust and Accountability:** The strength of our local council lies in its agility and community trust. This proposal maintains democratic representation and ensures local councillors are close to practice and accountable to their communities, which is a top priority for residents.

We urge the Government to give full consideration to this well-researched, financially sound, and community-led proposal. It is the only option that meets all of the Government's criteria while respecting and actively supporting the distinct local identities and economic needs of places like Lichfield.

We stand ready to support its progression to the next stage.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Redgate
President, Lichfield Chamber of Trade and Commerce

23 October 2025

We, the South Staffordshire Business Partnership Ambassadors Group welcome the opportunity to respond to the proposed Local Government reorganisation and share our collective perspective.

"Our Local Authority has developed a strong understanding of both the business landscape and the local community we serve. This dual perspective enables us to take a broader, more strategic view—supporting business growth in ways that also benefit the wider area.

It is essential that any future council structure maintains this locally connected approach. For SMEs, success is often built on trusted relationships, local insight, and the ability to navigate regional networks. In South Staffordshire, this has been achieved through a close, collaborative relationship between the business community and the Local Authority.

This connection works because the Local Authority is of a scale and proximity that allows it to remain genuinely engaged with local businesses. This model—rooted in trust, responsiveness, and shared ambition—should be preserved and championed as part of any local government reorganisation."

Adrian Maclaughlin, Dunston Business Village
Alexander Newport, Bradford Estates
Caroline Eaton, Berriman Eaton Estate Agents
Garth Watkins, Interclass
Mark Carnaghan, Eurofins Food Testing UK
Peter Webster, PcP Gratings
Colin Sweeney, Weston Park Enterprises
Carolyn Smith, TP Squared
Tony Hague, PP Control & Automation
Helen Hawkins, SI Group

PERTON PARISH COUNCIL

Becky Hodgetts
PARISH CLERK

4th April 2025

South Staffordshire Council
Wolverhampton Road
Codsall
South Staffordshire

Dear Sirs,

We support the local government structure as proposed by South Staffordshire Council that will recognise and protect the identity, and needs of our local communities.

South Staffordshire villages and neighbouring communities each have their own character and any new structure must respect these distinctions. Decisions that directly affect residents should be made at the most local level possible.

By creating three Unitary Councils they will serve populations of a manageable size ensuring they remain accessible and representative and will ensure fair and effective governance.

Focused unitary councils are best placed to promote sustainable economic growth, shape funding priorities, and provide infrastructure and services that meet the specific needs of their communities.

We believe these principles will help to create a strong, responsive, and community-focused local government model—one that respects our rural character, the recent Boundary Review and the retention of Parish Councils.

Yours faithfully

Becky Hodgetts
Clerk to Perton Parish Council

The Perton Civic Centre, Church Road, Coleridge Drive, Perton, Wolverhampton WV6 7PD
Telephone (01902) 745971 ▪ E-mail: council@pertonparishcouncil.gov.uk
Fax (01902) 747501 ▪ Website: www.pertonparishcouncil.gov.uk

The Old Mining College Centre
Queen Street
Chasetown
Burntwood
WS7 4QH

Tel: 01543 677166
Email: darren.ennis@burntwood-tc.gov.uk
www.burntwood-tc.gov.uk

Cllr Doug Pullen
Leader
Lichfield District Council
Frog Lane
Lichfield.

23 October 2025

Dear Doug,

I am writing in my capacity as Leader of Burntwood Town Council to express my support for Lichfield District Council's preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation, the creation of three smaller, community-focused unitary authorities across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

This model represents a positive and pragmatic approach to reorganisation that aligns strongly with the principles of localism, which are central to how we believe public services should be delivered: close to the people who use them, shaped by local priorities, and accountable to local communities.

The proposed structure replacing the current two-tier system with three unitary councils presents a real opportunity to simplify local governance, reduce duplication, and make it clearer for residents to understand who is responsible for what. By aligning decision-making more closely with the communities we serve, this model stands to strengthen democratic accountability and foster more responsive, efficient public services.

I particularly welcome the emphasis on council size. Evidence shows that unitary authorities serving populations of around 300,000 to 400,000 residents strike the best balance between financial sustainability, service quality, and local responsiveness. This is in contrast to much larger models, which risk becoming distant from the very communities they are meant to serve.

Furthermore, I believe this model offers significant potential to empower towns like Burntwood. By embedding decision-making more locally, we can ensure that our unique needs and aspirations are not only heard but acted upon. This approach supports the long-term goal of giving communities greater ownership and influence over the issues that affect their daily lives.

In summary, I support Lichfield District Council's proposal as the most effective and community-centred path forward. It is a model rooted in evidence, built around real places, and aligned with the government's own criteria for local government reform.

I hope this vision gains the backing it deserves and look forward to working with partners across the area to shape the future of local government in a way that truly delivers for our residents.

Kind regards,

Darren.

Cllr Darren Ennis

Town & District Councillor for Chasetown Ward

Leader of Burntwood Town Council

Shadow Cabinet Member for Leisure and Major Projects

07713 831030

Lapley, Stretton & Wheaton Aston Parish Council

Office FF028
South Staffordshire Business Hub
South Staffordshire District Council
Wolverhampton Road
Codsall
Wolverhampton
Staffordshire
WV8 1PX
Tel: 01902 327091/07495789051
office@wheatonastonparishcouncil.gov.uk
Parish Council Clerk: Amy Watson

22nd October 2025

Dear Sirs,

Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston Parish Council is pleased to express its support for the principles and values underpinning South Staffordshire Council's vision for local government in Staffordshire. We endorse the proposed local government structure, which recognises and protects the identity and needs of our local communities.

South Staffordshire villages and neighbouring communities each have their own character, and any new local government infrastructure must respect these distinctions. Decisions that directly affect residents should be made at the most local level possible. The unique rural nature of our area means that smaller, focused councils are better placed to respond effectively to local needs, ensuring that residents remain connected to their representatives and that governance is accessible and responsive.

By creating three Unitary Councils, populations will remain manageable, allowing councils to be representative and to provide fair and effective governance. Focused unitary councils are best placed to promote sustainable economic growth, shape funding priorities, and provide infrastructure and services tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

We share and endorse the core aims: to preserve and enhance the unique identities of our villages; to ensure decision-making remains close to our communities; to strengthen the ability of local government to drive economic growth and influence strategic funding decisions; and to establish well-balanced councils serving manageable populations.

These values reflect the essence of what local government should represent — a strong, connected, and responsive system that empowers communities to shape their own future. We are confident that this vision will create the foundations for more effective collaboration, improved service delivery, and greater local influence.

Lapley, Stretton and Wheaton Aston Parish Council is proud to support this shared vision for a vibrant, locally empowered, and rural-friendly Staffordshire and looks forward to continuing to work to achieve this.

Yours faithfully

Amy Watson

www.wheatonastonparishcouncil.gov.uk

Lapley, Stretton &
Wheaton Aston Parish Council

@WAstonParish

Wombourne Parish Council

Wombourne Civic Centre

Gravel Hill
Wombourne
South Staffordshire
WV5 9HA

Tel: 01902 896300
Email: enquiries@wombourneparishcouncil.org.uk
Website: www.wombourneparishcouncil.gov.uk
Clerk: Mrs Rachael Wright

22nd October 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: Letter of Support for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Proposal

Wombourne Parish Council is pleased to express its support for the principles and values underpinning South Staffordshire Council's vision for local government in Staffordshire.

We share and wholeheartedly endorse the core aims — to preserve and enhance the unique and distinct identities of our villages; to ensure that decision-making remains close to our communities; to strengthen the ability of local government to drive economic growth and influence strategic funding decisions; and to establish well-balanced councils that serve manageable populations.

These values reflect the very essence of what local government should represent — a strong, connected and responsive system that empowers communities to shape their own future.

We are confident that this vision will help create the foundations for more effective collaboration, improved service delivery and greater local influence.

Wombourne Parish Council is proud to support this shared vision for a vibrant and locally empowered Staffordshire and looks forward to continuing to work closely with South Staffordshire Council in achieving it.

Yours faithfully,

Rachael Wright

Rachael Wright
Clerk to Wombourne Parish Council

FEATHERSTONE AND BRINSFORD PARISH COUNCIL

CLERK: ROBERT YOUNG

TELEPHONE: 07885050424

2C, APPIAN CLOSE,
TWO GATES,
TAMWORTH,
STAFFORDSHIRE,

B77 1JA

C.PETERSON
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE COUNCIL
WOLVERHAMPTON ROAD
CODSALL
SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE.

31ST OCTOBER 2025

To whom it may concern

We are writing to you as Featherstone and Brinsford Parish Council to express our support for the Local Government Reorganisation proposal put forward jointly by South Staffordshire Council, Cannock Chase District Council and Stafford Borough Council.

Featherstone and Brinsford Parish Council does not support Local Government Reorganisation and many residents in Featherstone and Brinsford do not support it either. However, if it is forced upon us then the combination of South Staffordshire Council, Cannock Chase District Council and Stafford Borough Council is the preferred option.

Although this is a large council, we believe this proposal will be the best option for democracy, keeping residents as close as possible to their local council and elected representatives. It keeps the council size large enough for an effective unitary but not too big that it becomes unwieldy.

Featherstone and Brinsford Parish Council also wishes to express our dissatisfaction at the proposal by Staffordshire County Council to split Staffordshire East and West. This would mean council decisions for our Parish could be made over an hour away in Stoke-on-Trent, and this is not welcomed by anybody in Featherstone and Brinsford.
We need to keep democracy local and ensure that residents are at the heart of all decision making, and we urge the Government to rethink their plans for Local Government Reorganisation.

Yours Faithfully

Featherstone and Brinsford Parish Council

Signed:
Cllr F. Beardsmore (Chairman)
Cllr R. Tucker (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr J. Smith
Cllr V. Lockley
Cllr A. Rowe
Cllr Z. Webb
Cllr D. Randell
Cllr T. Smitheman
Cllr M. Perks
Cllr J. Brindle
Cllr D. Betts

Fazeley Town Council

Town Clerk
2C,Appian Close,
Two Gates, Tamworth,
Staffs, B77 1JA
Telephone: 07855050424

Georgia Frend,   28th October 2025
Lichfield District Council
Frog Lane,
Lichfield.
To whom it may concern,   Re: Local Government Reorganisation

We are writing to you as Fazeley Town Council to express our support for the Local Government Reorganisation proposal put forward jointly by Lichfield District Council, Tamworth Borough Council and South Staffordshire District Council. Fazeley Town Council does not support Local Government Reorganisation and many residents in Fazeley, Mile Oak and Bonehill do not support it either. However, if it is forced upon us then the split of two unitary councils in the South of Staffordshire and one in the North is our preferred direction.

This would make Fazeley Town Council a parish that falls under a unitary council with Tamworth, Lichfield and East Staffordshire. Although this is a large council, we believe this proposal will be the best option for democracy, keeping residents as close as possible to their local council and elected representatives. It keeps the council size large enough for an effective unitary but not too big that it becomes unwieldy.

Fazeley Town Council also wishes to express our dissatisfaction at the proposal by Staffordshire County Council to split Staffordshire East and West. This would mean council decisions for Fazeley could be made over an hour away in Stoke-on-Trent, and this is not welcomed by anybody in Fazeley, Mile Oak or Bonehill.

We need to keep democracy local and ensure that residents are at the heart of all decision making, and we urge the Government to rethink their plans for Local Government Reorganisation. It doesn't work for Staffordshire and our residents have resoundingly told us it is not their priority.

Yours,

Fazeley Town Council
Signed:
Cllr John Hill (Mayor of Fazeley)
Cllr Gordon Moore (Deputy Mayor of Fazeley)
Cllr Alex Farrell
Cllr Simon Goodall
Cllr Olivia Shepherd
Cllr Susan Bree
Cllr Fiona Aston
Cllr Donna Summers
Cllr James Nicolson-Roberts
Cllr Jo Atkins

Hammerwich
Parish Council

T: 01543 580145
W: Hammerwich-pc.gov.uk
E: clerk@hammerwich-pc.gov.uk

23rd October 2025

Councillor Doug Pullen
Leader of Lichfield District Council
Lichfield District Council
Frog Lane
Lichfield
WS13 6YU

Subject: Support for Three Smaller Unitary Authorities in Staffordshire

Dear Cllr Pullen,

Hammerwich Parish Council wishes to express its full support for the proposal, as outlined by Lichfield District Council, to establish three smaller unitary authorities across Staffordshire.

We believe that any emerging local authority must remain close, relevant, and accountable to the communities it serves. Local democracy matters, and it is essential that any new unitary structure ensures wards remain of a size that allows councillors to be visible, accessible, and knowledgeable about their local areas.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr M. Greenway
Chair
Hammerwich Parish Council

Lichfield City Council

City Council Offices, Donegal House, Bore Street, Lichfield, WS13 6LU

Town Clerk: Anthony D. Briggs B.A. (hons), CiLCA

To:
Simon Fletcher – Chief Executive, LDC
Cllr Doug Pullen, Leader, LDC

Switchboard: *(01543) 250011*
Email: *Tony.briggs@lichfield.gov.uk*

28 October 2025

Dear Doug and Simon

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

We write, representing Lichfield City Council, to express this council's support for Lichfield District Council's LGR proposals.

The City Council currently comprises 29 members, 26 of whom are representatives of either the Conservative Party, Labour Party or Liberal Democrats. We confirm that those political groups support your proposal to create three smaller unitary authorities across Staffordshire, giving a majority of approximately 90% in favour.

We have been asked to highlight that Reform UK representatives – 2 of the city council's 29 councillors (7%) - support SCC's proposals rather than LDC's, but like SCC, do not support the overall principle of this LGR.

We would also wish to highlight the vital role that parish councils play, and that this role will become even more vital after reorganisation.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact the Town Clerk in the first instance.
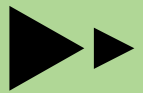
Yours sincerely

Claire Pinder Smith
Mayor, Lichfield City
LCC Chair 2025/26

Tony Briggs
Town Clerk/Chief Executive, LCC

Appendix 5

Letter from the leader of Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Driving **prosperity**, preserving **identity**

15 October 2025

Councillor Doug Pullen
Leader of Lichfield District Council

Councillor Kath Perry MBE
Leader of South Staffordshire Council

Councillor Carol Dean
Leader of Tamworth Borough Council

**City of
Stoke-on-Trent**

Councillor Jane Ashworth OBE
Council Leader
Cabinet Member for
Strategy, Economic Development,
Culture & Sport

Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Civic Centre, Glebe Street,
Stoke-on-Trent. ST4 1HH

01782 232468
Jane.ashworth@stoke.gov.uk

Dear Doug, Kath and Carol

Thank you for your letter sent on 12 September requesting the city council's support for your preferred option of a three unitary model for Staffordshire. We are very grateful for the support and engagement we have had from your officers over the last few months as we have been developing our submissions for the Government's 28 November deadline.

We are disappointed that the six councils in the southern part of the county haven't been able to come to a unified position on the best option. I know all six support a North Staffordshire council, covering the existing Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle under Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands areas, which is helpful to us in developing our proposal.

You will note that in our interim submission to Government in March, we presented our preferred option for a North Staffordshire unitary on the basis that it would be mirrored by a similar sized unitary in the south, covering the rest of the county. Indeed, the work that was progressed from there involved the city working alongside the six councils in the south to develop a two unitary proposal for the county.

Our position hasn't changed since March. We believe that the two unitary model meets the Government's criteria most closely, especially in terms of population size for each authority.

We also stated in our March submission that the North Staffordshire model can work alongside different combinations for the rest of the county. We maintain this position and consequently our submission will confirm that we would be willing to work with a three unitary model should that be the Government's final position.

Regardless of the outcome, I and my officers look forward to continued positive engagement with you.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Jane Ashworth OBE
Council Leader - Stoke-on-Trent City Council

Tell us if you need this letter in an alternative format

Contact the council: Telephone 01782 234 234   stoke.gov.uk

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