

Creating Two Balanced and Financially Sustainable Unitary Councils

Proposal for
Local Government
Reorganisation in
Staffordshire and
Stoke-on-Trent



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Foreword

In working towards a new local government landscape for Staffordshire, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council took the deliberate step of not rushing into any premature decision on future structures, when the invitation came from Government to submit an Interim Plan in March 2025.

We took stock of the discussions as a member of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Leaders Board. We noted the early proposal from Stoke-on-Trent City Council and southern districts for a two unitary model placing us in the North alongside Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme, and the desire of Staffordshire County Council to absorb all the districts into one council and keep Stoke-on-Trent as it is.

While we firmly backed moves towards devolution for the county, in line with the rest of the Leaders Board, we wanted to give reorganisation the proper consideration and attention it deserves, for the sake of our residents, businesses and stakeholders – and crucially to consider what might work best for the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

In reading our proposal, we hope that our careful considerations firmly come through as we seek to improve services, give local people more say on decisions that affect them, reduce waste and duplication, and deliver savings to free up the maximum amount of money to be reinvested to ensure positive outcomes for the future.

Our overriding conclusion is that a two unitary solution would work best for Staffordshire, given a



population of 1.13 million, with one council serving the North and another covering Southern and mid-Staffordshire. We believe both would provide sensible economic geographies and reflect established local and cultural identities.

But we go further! We believe the modification of a larger North Staffordshire council, or Enhanced North Staffordshire as we are calling it, is the best way to go: balancing out the populations in the North and Southern and mid-Staffordshire by bringing in towns and villages we believe sit better in the North, giving fairer democratic representation between urban and rural areas, and providing the opportunity for a more equitable council tax base that can help support the known financial challenges faced by Stoke-on-Trent.

Our proposal is the outcome of detailed research and consultation, independent verification and appropriate due diligence. It is a strong fit with the criteria set by Government.

It is built on councillor involvement – we set up a cross-party Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation Sub Committee to work through an options appraisal and develop a preference. We held face-to-face meetings with representatives of our 42 parish and town councils and have helped take them along the journey to change. We have engaged with our residents and businesses and kept members

of parliament informed. We have paid considerable attention to the Government's criteria for LGR and public sector reform, and we have observed developments nationwide as other councils work on their own proposals.

This has been a carefully considered and balanced approach, leading to a proposal we hope Government will find compelling and one worthy of support, as we all strive for a local government structure that will best serve Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent over the coming decades.

Our proposal sees real opportunities for an enhanced North Staffordshire Unitary Council. It will offer a stronger delivery model on a bigger canvass that will fit both national and local priorities such as house building in the right places, a comprehensive public transport system improving connectivity between towns, villages and the city, job creation, upskilling current and future generations, all backed up by first class services that enhance the quality of life for all our residents

We thank you for considering our proposal and we look forward to further engagement with you regarding local government reorganisation in our area.



Councillor Mike Gledhill,
Leader of Staffordshire
Moorlands District Council



Councillor Linda Malyon,
Chair, Staffordshire Moorlands
District Council Devolution and
Local Government Reorganisation
Sub Committee

Executive Summary

Overview

This proposal for local government reorganisation has been developed by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council in response to the invitation by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to the 10 local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

In the invitation the Secretary of State confirmed that six criteria would be used to assess the proposals that are made.

1	Establishing a single tier of local government
2	Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks
3	High quality and sustainable public services
4	Working together to understand and meet local needs
5	Supporting future devolution arrangements
6	Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

This Proposal sets out in detail how it meets the criteria by creating two balanced and financially sustainable unitary councils. It highlights how the proposed new structure will tackle several significant challenges faced by the existing councils

in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and seize the opportunities that reorganisation will bring to improve outcomes for residents

The invitation and guidance issued by the Government has made it clear that, in compliance with the legislation, in any proposal the new unitary structure must be based on existing district (or county) area boundaries, and these should be the building blocks for a proposal. It acknowledges that councils may seek to deliver boundary changes as part of a proposal and in these cases, it should include a Base Proposal using districts as building blocks and, in parallel as part of the submission, request the Secretary of State to modify boundaries using his powers of modification. The proposed modification should achieve an even better outcome than the Base Proposal and strong justification should be made.

This proposal requests a boundary modification, and the proposal refers to a Base Proposal and a Modified Proposal when setting out the strong justification for this.



Collaboration

The Council has collaborated with the other nine local authorities in development of the Proposal. There has not been a consensus on a single proposal, and this Proposal will be submitted alongside four other proposals from local authorities in the area.

Despite having different preferences for local government reorganisation, the underlying ambition of all is to unlock devolution for the area. The potential for devolution to bring significant powers and funding to the region is recognised and the councils share the same preference for a Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. This preference is at the centre of the development of all the proposals by the councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Timescales for Implementation

It is expected that new unitary councils will be in place from April 2028. The key stages following submission of proposals and the expected timescales are:

Submission of proposals	28th November 2025
Government consultation on proposals received	Early in 2026
Government decision	Expected in July 2026
Preparation of legislation	Autumn/Winter 2026
Shadow unitary council elections	May 2027
New unitary councils go live	April 2028

Challenges and Opportunities

Reorganisation of the existing councils into a single tier unitary structure presents a significant opportunity for local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to be put on a much firmer footing. This will facilitate significant improvements in outcomes for residents. It also provides a timely opportunity to tackle several of the significant challenges currently faced by the councils in the area which this Proposal seeks to address:

Complexities of Service Delivery

The varied contrast of communities across the area, which is made up of high-density urban areas, a significant number of market towns, and large areas of rurality presents lots of challenges for service delivery. The move to a single tier of local government across the county provides an opportunity to integrate service delivery across the area whilst structuring appropriately to retain a strong locality-based focus.

Demographic Challenges

The population is expected to continue to increase, but a significant challenge is the changing age profile with substantial growth in the older population. This significant demographic shift present complex challenges for the existing local authorities and will need to be at the forefront in the strategic planning of the new unitary councils. An ageing population alongside the pockets of deprivation is likely to result in a continuing increased demand on health and social care services, housing, and resident support requirements.

Supporting the Economy

The economy is relatively strong and includes several major international manufacturers alongside many medium sized enterprises operating within the county. There are areas where there is a high concentration of micro businesses which demonstrates the reliance on its entrepreneurial character. Productivity levels are below average across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and there has been a need to move away from the development of traditional skills required to provide local businesses with a qualified workforce. The new unitary councils will need to continue to support the development of the economy, and the opportunities provided by integrating into a single tier offers a significant opportunity to create additional capacity to have a greater impact.

Financial Sustainability

Local government finance in England currently faces significant challenges, with local authorities struggling to balance rising costs and increased service demands. The financial challenges are being faced by all the existing councils particularly Stoke-on-Trent City Council who, alongside a growing number of councils, are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support. Local government reorganisation will result in significant financial savings and provides an opportunity to put local government in the area on a firmer financial footing. Beyond the immediate financial gains from local government reorganisation, there is the potential that the new, more effective structures will provide further opportunities for value creation and sustained financial health. Taking the opportunity to develop strategies to harmonise council tax and manage debt effectively at an early stage will further strengthen the financial resilience needed to withstand broader economic shocks and uncertainty.

Reorganisation into a single tier will deliver significant financial benefits. There are however several specific challenges related to the reorganisation process which will need to be carefully navigated to realise these benefits:

- Significant investment will be necessary for implementation which will include the disaggregation of services currently provided on a county wide basis
- Redefining and aligning services will require a sustained effort
- Harmonisation of the existing workforce will be complex
- There will be a need to reset place leadership and strategic/locality partnership arrangements
- Democratic representation and accountability will need to be appropriately designed
- Asset rationalisation will be complex and will take time

There will also be the complexities of disaggregating the services provided by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council who operate them jointly through the Strategic Alliance with High Peak Borough Council in Derbyshire. It is essential that the timescales for reorganisation in the two areas are aligned.

Vision for Local Government Reorganisation

After consideration of these opportunities and challenges, the vision is that unitary local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is built on:

	A single tier of local government, working collaboratively across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	
	Enhancement of financial, social and environmental resilience of local government across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	
	Creation of new unitary councils that are large enough to deliver efficiently but close enough to listen and respond to local needs i.e. realising the benefits of scale, while maintaining local connections	
	Building on the principles of an innovative/creative county that is vibrant and retains the existing social and economic identity, recognises diversity, and plays to its strengths	
	Balancing the population and economic strength of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent across the areas to create mutually supportive unitary councils	
	Establishing a governance model for the new unitary councils that improves service delivery, strengthens community bonds, and drives sustainable multi-dimensional growth.	
	Developing a structure of local government that unlocks devolution for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	

Options Assessment and Appraisal

The available options for the future structure of the unitary councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have been carefully considered in a three-stage process:

- 1). **Stage One – a high-level options assessment** which considered a large range of options for reorganisation and identified a small number of shortlisted options to consider in more detail
- 2). **Stage Two – an outline options appraisal** that set the foundational vision, assessed the shortlisted options against the criteria, and identified a preferred option
- 3). **Stage Three – full options appraisal**, including detailed financial analysis of three of the options and identified the final option for the development of this Proposal

The high-level options assessment involved exploring a significant number of different options to establish a shortlist.

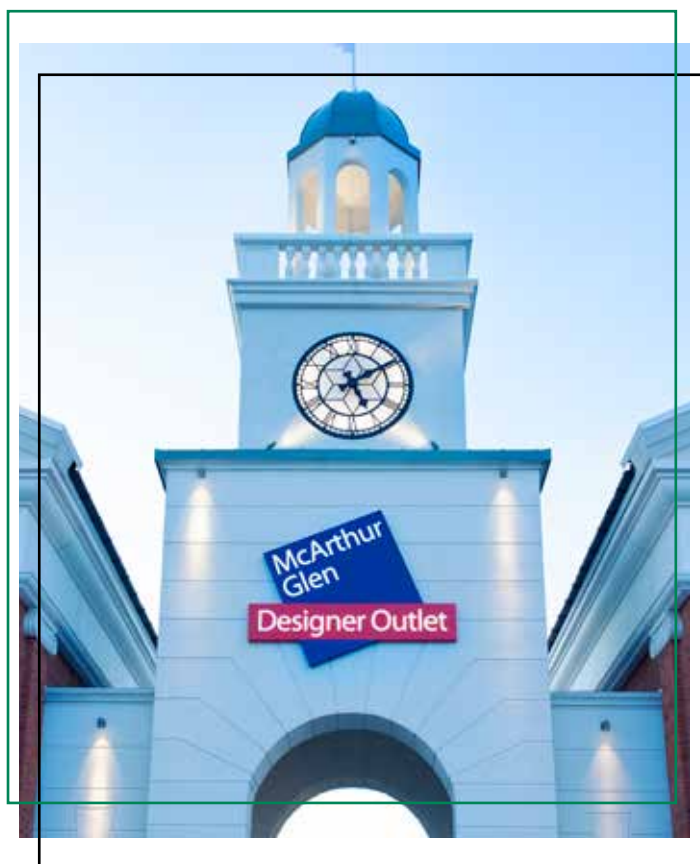
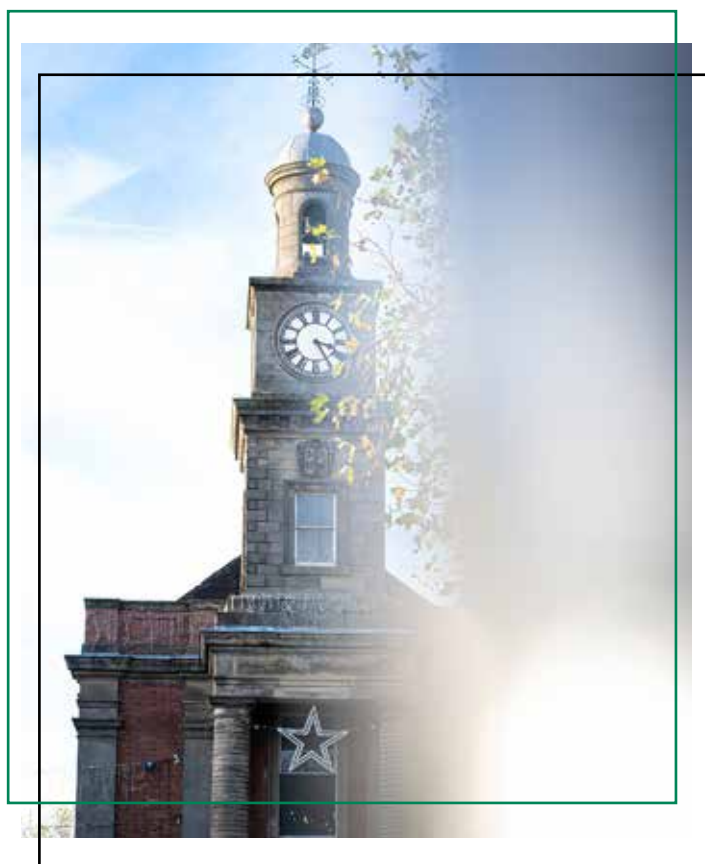
As Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has a population of c.1.1million, models of less than two unitary councils would result in them being significantly below the guiding principle of unitary councils with a population of 500,000 and would need to be strongly justified. The high-level assessment reached a conclusion on the number of unitary councils in the new model of unitary local government:

- A single unitary council for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent was dismissed as a viable option due to its size and scale. It also would misalign with the area's devolution ambition for a Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.



- It was recognised that, in addition to the guiding principle, there were other important considerations, over and above economies of scale, that needed to be considered in determining the most appropriate option. Lots of empirical evidence demonstrates the potential benefits that can be realised from smaller unitary councils such as the sense of place and identity and coherence of economic geography. Careful consideration was given to a small number of three unitary models as it was recognised that they have some merit, however they were eventually discounted due to increased costs, reduction in financial benefits, limited financial resilience and the potential of fragmentation of services
- Economic data shows that North Staffordshire is a cohesive economic geography which has formed around the economic needs and activities created within Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, the market towns of the Staffordshire Moorlands and other smaller settlements. The geography also aligns to housing market areas
- The local authority areas in the South of the County have strong links with the West Midlands conurbation, including high levels of in/out commuting, and high levels of visitor flows for retail and leisure opportunities. There are also strong connections in the Southeast of the county into Derbyshire and the East Midlands.

The high-level assessment then focussed on two unitary models. One of the key foundations for creating new unitary councils for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is the economic geography:



Four two unitary council options with a North/South split (including the option for a County Unitary co-existing with Stoke-on-Trent which would remain unchanged) were shortlisted for analysis in the outline options appraisal. However, after the completion of the outline options appraisal, Staffordshire County Council confirmed that they had changed their preferred option and would be developing a proposal for a two unitary model with an East/West split. This option was therefore considered in detail at the full options appraisal stage.

In both the outline and full option appraisal stages, each of the options were assessed against the criteria set out in the guidance. The full options appraisal stage also considered a detailed financial appraisal of the options that warranted further consideration.

Conclusions were reached in respect of each option following the full appraisal:

Option A			
	Staffordshire Cannock Chase East Staffordshire Lichfield Newcastle-under-Lyme South Staffordshire Stafford Staffordshire Moorlands Tamworth	Stoke-on-Trent (unchanged)	Population Staffordshire 875,900 Stoke-on-Trent 258,400
Assessment against Criteria			
• Does not meet all the criteria • Leaving Stoke-on-Trent unchanged does not address the financial sustainability issues • Would cause a significant democratic deficit • Whole Staffordshire Unitary would be too large and remote from communities and there would be complexities for service delivery • Was initially Staffordshire County Council's preferred option but was later disregarded			
Financial Appraisal			
• Not assessed as it was disregarded at the outline options stage			

Option B



North Staffordshire
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stoke-on-Trent

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
Cannock Chase
East Staffordshire
Lichfield
South Staffordshire
Stafford
Tamworth

Population
North Staffordshire
477,500

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
656,800

Assessment against Criteria

- Sufficiently meets all the criteria
- Shaped around a sensible economic geography and reflects local identity
- Broadly meets the guiding principle of 500,000 population but would create a significant disparity in population split of the two unitary councils and an even larger difference in the tax bases
- The Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary would comparatively large and find it difficult to maintain connections with localities
- The North Staffordshire Unitary would be dominated by the city of Stoke-on-Trent and risks rural issues being overlooked
- Was initially the preferred option of seven of the other local authorities (although this has since reduced to only four)

Financial Appraisal

- Strongest option in respect of financial benefits and payback period – however only marginally better than Option D

Option C



North Staffordshire
East Staffordshire
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stoke-on-Trent

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
Cannock Chase
Lichfield
South Staffordshire
Stafford
Tamworth

Population
North Staffordshire
601,500
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
532,800

Assessment against Criteria

- Sufficiently meets all the criteria
- Provides a reasonable balance of population with a larger authority in the North where financial sustainability is more of a challenge
- Economic geography is misaligned in the South of the East Staffordshire Borough
- Not supported by any of the other local authorities

Financial Appraisal

- Not assessed as it was disregarded at the outline options stage

Option D

	North Staffordshire East Staffordshire (Part) Newcastle-under-Lyme Stafford (Part) Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent	Southern and Mid-Staffordshire East Staffordshire (Part) Cannock Chase Lichfield	Population North Staffordshire 536,172 Southern and Mid-Staffordshire 598,128
		South Staffordshire Stafford (Part) Tamworth	

Assessment against Criteria

- Sufficiently meets all the criteria
- Is built around Option B
- Most complex option as it involves a boundary change but would have strong justification
- Shaped around a sensible economic geography and reflects local identity – the proposed boundary changes improve the alignment when compared with Option B
- Balances the population across the two unitary councils and reduces the significant disparity in Option B
- Provides a balance between the urban demands of the city of Stoke-on-Trent and the demands of the surrounding areas
- Shares the foundations for growth across the two unitary councils

Financial Appraisal

- Strong option in respect of financial benefits and payback period – only marginally worse than Option B – but provides a more even distribution of the savings across the two unitary councils
- Confirmed as the Preferred Option

Option E

	Staffordshire East East Staffordshire Lichfield Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent Tamworth	Staffordshire West Cannock Chase Newcastle-under-Lyme South Staffordshire Stafford	Population Staffordshire East 663,330 Staffordshire West 471,179

Assessment against Criteria

- Does not meet all the criteria
- Whilst there is some logic to the East/West split in the South of the county, it does not appear to be sensible to split the North of the county on the same basis – a North/South split has a more compelling argument as a sensible economic geography
- It fragments the existing patterns of local identity particularly in the North by splitting Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme

Financial Appraisal

- Strong option in relation to net benefits and payback (although weakest of the three appraised) – a disproportionate amount of the savings accrue to the Staffordshire East Unitary

Base Proposal

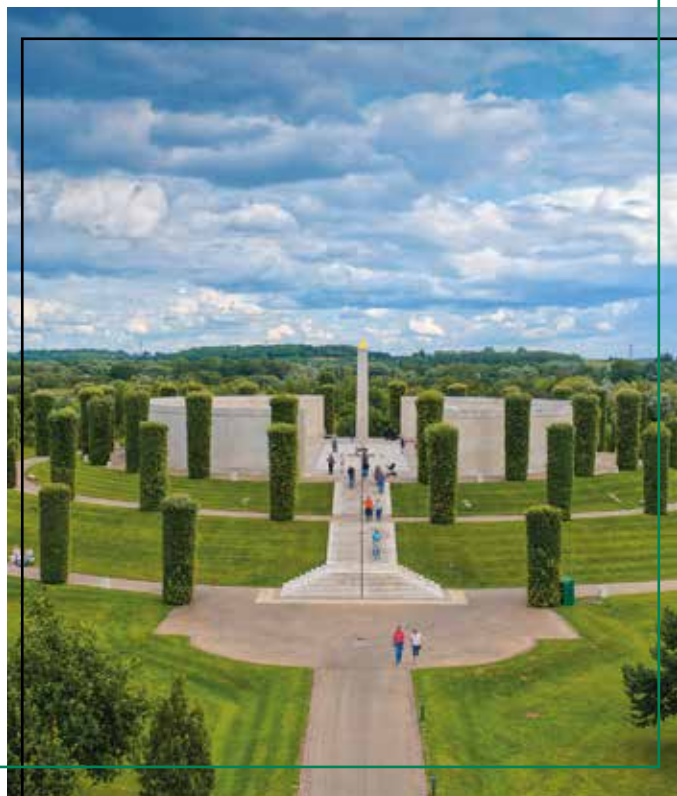
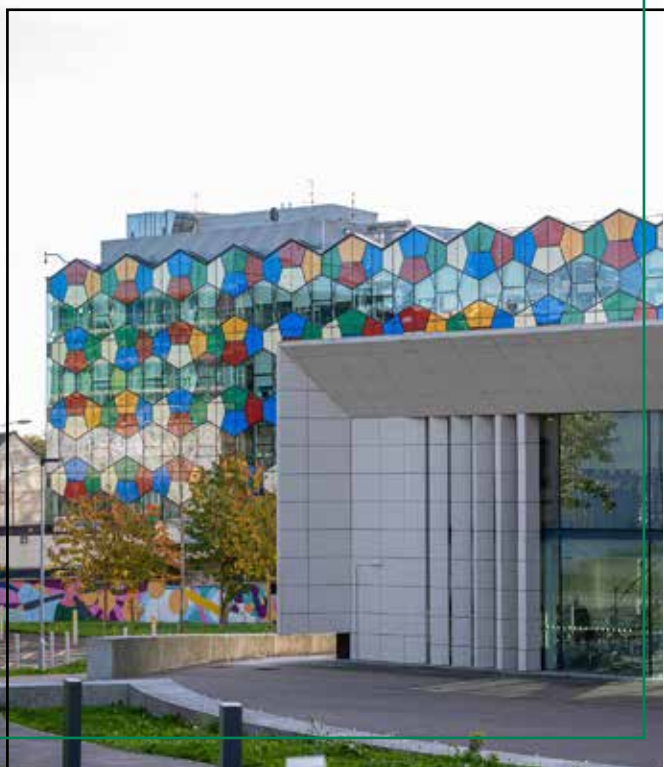
The Base Proposal in this submission is based on whole district and borough boundaries, prepared in accordance with Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the February 2025 invitation. It is a statutory Base Proposal and is not the final proposal being made.

The Base Proposal groups existing principal authorities into two unitary councils, without any changes to existing district and borough council boundaries:

- **North Staffordshire Unitary Council** - including Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council

- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Council** - including Cannock Chase District Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire District Council, Stafford Borough Council and Tamworth Borough Council

The analysis in the options appraisal concludes that the Base Proposal meets the criteria for unitary local government.



Modification Request

This Proposal contains a modification request in that it provides for boundary changes in the existing district areas of East Staffordshire Borough Council and Stafford Borough Council.

Careful consideration has been given to the extent of the boundary modification and the need to ensure effective arrangements of democratic representation in the newly created Councils. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England has confirmed that it is expected that appropriate interim warding arrangements will be set out in the structural changes order for the new unitary councils and that it will not be able to carry out an electoral review on any authority before it has vested. Any electoral arrangements in a proposal that is implemented will be required to be based on existing ward boundaries (at parish, district or county level).

Potential warding arrangements for the two new unitary councils have been developed to inform the basis of the precise split of the boundary between the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Councils. This will ensure that the modification request, if accepted, will support the Structural Changes Order development process.

The boundary modification request is that a number of parish areas of East Staffordshire Borough Council and Stafford Borough Council are included in the proposed North Staffordshire unitary council:

The following parishes of East Staffordshire Borough Council:			
Blithfield	Ellastone	Mayfield	Stanton
Croxden	Kingstone	Okeover	Uttoxeter Town
Denstone	Leigh	Ramshorn	Uttoxeter Rural
Draycott in the Clay	Marchington	Rocester	Wootton

The following parishes of Stafford Borough Council:		
Barlaston	Stone Town	Swynnerton
Fulford	Stone Rural	Yarnfield and Cold Meece

Modified Proposal

There are significant opportunities to improve the Base Proposal with a boundary modification. There is compelling justification for this adjustment based on six key factors:

Population Distribution - The Base Proposal will create a significant disparity between the size of the two unitary councils which the boundary modification will significantly reduce:

Unitary Council	Base Proposal		Modified Proposal	
	Population	Share	Population	Share
North Staffordshire	477,500	42.1%	536,172	47.3%
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire	656,800	57.9%	598,128	52.7%

The guiding principle suggesting new unitary councils of a population size of 500,000 or greater to ensure financial resilience and to be able to withstand ‘financial shocks’ is a particularly important consideration for the North Staffordshire unitary which will include the existing Stoke-on-Trent City Council unitary which is in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and has significant ongoing cost demand challenges associated with high levels of deprivation.

Staffordshire unitary council to recognise the differing and competing focus with a significant number of towns and large settlements. The towns of Stone and Uttoxeter have strong economic and social connections to the city of Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire and, by including them in the North Staffordshire unitary, the boundary modification will create more cohesive and recognisable boundaries, supporting jobs and cultural identity across the newly formed authorities

Due to its size, the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council proposed in the Base Proposal will be extremely challenged to maintain meaningful connections with local communities, respond to disparate local needs, and preserve distinct local identities across such a wide geography.

Financial sustainability of the North Staffordshire Unitary Council - In the Base Proposal, there would be a significant in-balance in the council tax and business rates bases of the North Unitary and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils which would potentially be a challenge for ongoing financial sustainability in the North.

The modification proposed will provide for a more even split of population which will work towards addressing these issues.

Social and economic alignment - The social and economic alignments of the existing Staffordshire district and boroughs with each other and outside the county are complex.

The North Staffordshire unitary council in the Base Proposal recognises the strong social and economic and social alignment of its predecessor local authorities. North Staffordshire is already an identifiable economic area. It will be a complex challenge, however, for the Southern and Mid-

The consolidated tax bases of the new unitary councils are an important consideration, and the boundary modification has a significant impact in addressing some of this disparity:

	Population	Proportion of Population	Council Tax Base	Proportion of Council Tax Base
		%		%
Base Proposal				
North Staffordshire	477,500	42.1	143,040	38.7
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire	656,800	57.9	226,518	61.3
	1,134,300		369,558	
Modified Proposal				
North Staffordshire	536,172	47.3	165,213	44.7
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire	598,128	52.7	204,345	55.3
	1,134,300		369,558	

Balance of growth opportunities - The proposed modification request will balance the opportunities for employment and housing growth across the two unitary councils.

Housing growth has been a challenge for the predecessor councils of the North Staffordshire unitary proposed in the Base Proposal. Given the strength of previous housing delivery in the East Staffordshire and Stafford Borough areas and the existing commitments for future development around Stone and Uttoxeter, the proposed modification will provide a more equitable balance of potential housing growth across the two new unitary councils taking into consideration the significant potential for housing growth in the other current local authority areas which will form part of the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council.

There are several strategic growth opportunities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent which provide opportunities for growth in both employment and housing in the South of the county these include the A5 Growth Corridor, the i54 development and A38/M42 Growth Corridor. In the North of the County, the main strategic opportunity is based around the A50/A500 corridor and the Fifty500 initiative was officially launched in February 2024, and its

prospectus seeks to facilitate plans for regional supplier parks, innovation centres, and sustainable business premises, aiming to create 5,000 new jobs and add £100 million in gross value by 2030. This opportunity is aligned with the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone which will help to create up to 9,000 new jobs and use 140 hectares of brownfield land.

The proposed boundary between the two new unitary authorities in the Base Proposal cuts across the A50 Growth Corridor. The Modified Proposal would see all the A50 Growth Corridor included in the North Staffordshire unitary, better balancing the strategic opportunities for the two areas and providing a better platform for the North Staffordshire unitary to realise housing and employment growth in line with its targets.

Balance between rural and urban areas of North Staffordshire and consequences for democratic representation - In the North Staffordshire unitary, there will be a need to balance the urban demands of the city of Stoke-on-Trent with the demands of towns and villages and hamlets in the rest of the unitary council area.

The Modified Proposal allows a better balance of population across the proposed North Staffordshire unitary council. In the Base Proposal, the population of the city of Stoke-on-Trent (258,400) would be larger than the rest of the area (219,100) – there would be a risk of the specific issues relating to the market towns and rural villages and hamlets outside the city not having a sufficient focus. The boundary modification will provide for a better balance between the city of Stoke-on-Trent and the rest of the area.

Local Authority	Usual resident population 2021			
	Base Proposal		Modified Proposal	
		%		%
Stoke-on-Trent	258,400	54.1	258,400	48.2
Newcastle-under-Lyme	123,300		123,300	
Staffordshire Moorlands	95,800		95,800	
East Staffordshire	-		25,730	
Stafford	-		32,940	
Other Areas	219,100	45.9	277,770	51.8
Total Population	477,500		536,170	

This would also reduce the democratic deficit in the North unitary prior to any LGBCE Boundary Review that would follow the establishment of the unitary council. This specific concern was consistently raised by residents in the North of the county during the engagement on emerging proposals for reorganisation.

Boundary anomalies and the potential for service delivery simplification - The boundaries of local authorities are outdated. The existing structure of local authorities is largely based on the 1974 reform and as areas, including Stoke-on-Trent, have developed considerably, the boundaries no longer fully reflect how people live, work, and shop.

In the current arrangements in North Staffordshire, this has resulted in administrative boundaries that cut across settlements, which means that in some areas multiple local authorities are providing services, such as waste collection, to residents in a single settlement or in some cases the same street. Several examples of the existing anomalies will be reinforced by the proposed boundaries in the Base Proposal with the boundary between North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire cutting through several settlements including:

Blythe Bridge – a settlement South-East of Stoke-on-Trent with a population of approximately 6,000. The Base Proposal would result in the settlement being split between the North Staffordshire and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary.

Meir and Meir Heath – a suburb of Stoke-on-Trent situated in the South of the city which has grown significantly post war. In the Base Proposal the boundary between the two new unitary councils will cut across the A520 (Sandon Road) where close next-door neighbours will live either side of the boundary.

Trentham – a suburb of the city of Stoke-on-Trent South-West of the city centre and South of the neighbouring town of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Part of Trentham is in Stafford Borough, notably the parish church and the remaining buildings of the Trentham Hall estate which is now an award-winning visitor attraction branded as Trentham Gardens and is one of Stoke-on-Trent's major leisure and tourist attractions. In the Base Proposal these will all be part of Southern and Mid-Staffordshire despite being under six miles from the Stoke-on-Trent city centre.



Wedgwood – the home of the renowned ceramics manufacturer Wedgwood. Alongside the factory, which opened in 1950, there was a small residential development and between 2014 and 2016 there has been further housing development alongside a regeneration of the factory facility. The whole of the new housing development and the factory sits within the city of Stoke-on-Trent boundary, whereas the original housing development and the settlement's community facilities will be part of Southern and Mid-Staffordshire.

The requested modification presents a significant opportunity to resolve these issues to ensure that the new Councils are fit for purpose in the long term and don't reinforce boundaries that were drawn over 50 years ago.



Evaluation against the Criteria

The Proposal sets out detailed analysis against the criteria for unitary local government provided in the invitation from the Secretary of State. The analysis demonstrates that each of the criteria is met.

Criterion 1 - Establishing a single tier of local government

The proposal provides for a single tier of local government across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent through the creation of two evenly balanced new unitary councils.

It is based on a sensible area which strongly reflects the economic geography of the area. It reflects the population distribution across the varied urban and rural areas of the county and city, and the Modified Proposal truly reflects the lives and work travel patterns of their residents including recognising the transport and connectivity challenges that require investment to allow the region to prosper.

Throughout the engagement that has taken place with residents across the county and city, protecting local identity has emerged as one of the key priorities for residents to be considered in the new structure of unitary local government. This Proposal, with its boundary modification, better reflects the economic and social connections that will exist in the new unitary councils and will create more cohesive and culturally identifiable boundaries. The relationship with town and parish councils in the Staffordshire Moorlands, with its strong ties to its six unique localities, could provide a blueprint for the design of future arrangements in the North Staffordshire unitary council.

The more appropriate tax base split across the two future unitary councils in the Modified Proposal will ensure that there is not an unfair advantage which would potentially damage the future financial sustainability of the North Staffordshire Unitary with the financial challenges relating to the high

cost demands in the city of Stoke-on-Trent. This has been a significant concern of residents, particularly in the North of the county, throughout the LGR engagement process

The proposal will create a structure of unitary local government that supports wider public services delivery, will support growth in the local economy and result in better outcomes for residents.

Criterion 2 - Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks

In assessing the options for local government reorganisation a full financial appraisal was undertaken with clear financial objectives:

- Individual and cross-Staffordshire financial sustainability.
- To have a balance to the financial strength and sustainability of the new entities which will give the best platform for them to serve Staffordshire as a whole.
- Value for money by driving change at the minimum cost necessary and deriving efficiencies through greater economies of scale, removing waste and duplicate expenditure and making considered investment in people, technology, and processes.

The proposal includes an assessment of the significant financial benefits that will be realised from:

- Reductions in leadership and senior management
- Reductions in the cost of democracy
- ICT rationalisation and systems integration
- Reductions in corporate and support service costs

- Estates and asset rationalisation
- Procurement and contract consolidation
- Service and process transformation

There are also substantial funding opportunities from LGR to improve the financial sustainability of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Council tax harmonisation presents an opportunity to generate additional revenue as the levels of council tax are lifted to create parity at the earliest point across each proposed area. The importance of this additional revenue stream on future financial sustainability is significant but the way in which this is delivered will need to consider the impact that it may have on residents with low incomes particularly in the city of Stoke-on-Trent where current council

tax levels are significantly lower than in neighbouring authorities.

As with any large-scale programmes of change, there will need to be up front investment in implementation costs including:

- Programme management and transition team costs
- Redundancy and pension strain
- ICT integration or separation
- Property and rebranding
- Legal and governance setup

The Base Proposal and Modified Proposal are forecast to produce similar net benefits:

	Implementation Costs	Payback Period	Net Benefit Over 10 Years	Balance of benefits between North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils
	£m	Year	£m	% (differential)
Base Proposal	214	3.8	318	48.8:51.2 (2.4)
Modified Proposal	215	3.9	306	50.8:49.2 (1.6)

The Base Proposal produces marginally stronger net benefits over a ten-year investment period. The implementation costs associated with the additional disaggregation required due to the boundary change is one of the reasons for this, but they are relatively modest. The Modified Proposal however presents a significant advantage in that it results in the net benefits being shared more evenly across the two new unitary councils.

The forecast financial benefits are significant. They are forecast to total **£306.2m** over a **ten-year period**, peak at **£69m** per year **after 5 years** and have a payback **period of 3.9 years**.

Annual Savings in Year 5 (increasing thereafter)	£69.0m
Cumulative Net Benefit Across Staffordshire (10 years)	£306.2m
Payback Period – Staffordshire	3.9 years
North Staffordshire Unitary	3.3 years
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary	4.3 years
Balance of benefit between the North Staffordshire Unitary and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary	50.8:49.2

The implementation costs are primarily incurred in the earlier years while the annual savings grow throughout the assessment period, a large amount of these transition costs will need to be met from the reserves and resources currently held by the existing councils. The analysis in the proposal shows that there was some £99.58m of usable reserves available at the end of the 2023/24 financial year. The amount available for investment in the implementation of local government reorganisation could be potentially increased by any unused Earmarked Reserves held on 31st March 2028 and use of capital receipts with Government approved flexibility. Determination will need to be made on how to allocate these reserves to the new unitary authorities post-reorganisation. Based on the analysis and the total level of reserves, it is considered that there are sufficient reserves in Staffordshire to manage the costs of transition to the new arrangements.

Local government reorganisation will significantly improve the long-term financial sustainability of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and will remove the need for exceptional financial support currently required by Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The levels of outstanding debt has been benchmarked against similar areas and the conclusion reached is that the two new unitary councils will be able to manage this effectively and it will not threaten their long-term financial sustainability.

A full financial risk assessment has been undertaken which sets out the key risks and mitigation that is required. The mitigations include a potential request for Government to consider a capitalisation direction to enable the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund the transition to the single tier.

The proposal also included a cost benefit analysis to quantify the wider economic and social benefits. The discounted benefits analysis over a ten-year period, based on just the two quantifiable benefits shows that for **every £1 invested in local government reorganisation across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is expected to generate a minimum social return of £2.40**. The analysis also sets out the qualitative benefits as:

- Simplification of governance and clearer accountability
- Improved service integration and quality
- Improved long-term strategic planning
- Strengthening of local identity and community voice
- Workforce and organisational benefits
- Fairness, consistency, and equity for residents
- Foundation for devolution and future growth

Criterion 3 - High quality and sustainable public services

Local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to realign functions, funding and accountability around residents to improve outcomes. The savings generated from reorganisation, in addition to providing the necessary financial resilience, will present the new unitary councils with the opportunity to invest in service improvements.

There will also be an opportunity to reset, improve and transform services to ensure that they operate to the highest level of effectiveness, achieve service improvements and are sustainable. This will be guided by five key principles:

Finance led sustainability
Integration by default
Clear local accountability
Prevention and resilience
Growth and infrastructure as enablers of wellbeing

The two new unitary councils will develop strong neighbourhood working models to ensure the services are delivered in line with the needs of each locality. This will contain Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INT) with links to neighbourhood governance provided by Neighbourhood Area Committees (NAC).

The Proposal sets out a vision for each of the key local authority services alongside numerous opportunities to develop high quality and sustainable services across all functions of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The integration of services in single-tier delivery presents several immediate opportunities for improvements, examples include:

- Integrating housing, environmental health and community safety teams at neighbourhood level
- Co-locating leisure centres with family hubs, libraries and health services
- Linking leisure provision with tourism, culture with town-centre renewal
- Aligning spatial planning, housing and transport to maximise focus on housing delivery and economic growth
- Integrating highways and street scene to deliver “one visit, multiple fixes” and rapid, place-based responses



- Aligning housing, public health, adult social care and transport planning to improve services for older people

There are important considerations for critical services:

Delivering sustainable **Adult Social Care** requires a shift toward earlier intervention, seamless support across organisations and a confident, skilled and stable workforce. The two new unitary model creates the platform for a clearer, more accountable and prevention-focused system, underpinned by aligned commissioning and workforce development

Key delivery priorities include:

- Prevention first through neighbourhood teams integration

- Integrated commissioning and market shaping for specialist provision
- Local accountability with clear senior oversight and outcome focus
- Workforce resilience via shared training and recruitment pipelines

Delivering sustainable and high-quality **Children's Services** requires earlier intervention, local leadership, market reform and confident, well-supported practitioners. The two unitary model creates stronger democratic accountability, localised decision-making and a coherent approach to specialist commissioning.

Key delivery priorities include:



- Earlier help and prevention aligned to local need and community assets
- Localised family support and safeguarding leadership
- Shared commissioning scale for specialist placements and SEND services
- A stable workforce and consistent practice model supported by joint recruitment, training and supervision frameworks
- Clear safeguarding continuity through a strengthened partnership model

Designing the new unitary councils offers a transformative platform to strengthen place-based leadership, embed community priorities and deliver integrated, preventative public services across the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire.

The proposed two-unitary configuration aligns with existing public sector geographies, ensuring strong partnership coherence across the NHS Integrated Care System, Police and Crime Commissioner area and other regional agencies. It provides the scale needed for strategic reform while preserving local identity and governance. It also provides the platform to maximise public service reform opportunities across health, care, housing and community wellbeing.

The Proposal has been shaped through a detailed understanding of the local context, engagement with members, residents, officers, town and parish councils and community stakeholders and a forward-looking vision for long-term improvements in public service outcomes and democratic accountability.

Both proposed unitary councils will possess sufficient population, fiscal diversity and institutional capacity to deliver sustainable reform and withstand future financial shocks, while enabling localised responsiveness through place-based governance. Local government reorganisation provides the catalyst and conditions for meaningful whole system

transformation, particularly in relation to the delivery of integrated, preventative services.

The current two-tier arrangements across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent creates duplication, blurred accountability and disjointed delivery across key services, particularly social care, housing, public health and prevention. Current council boundaries and service responsibilities do not always reflect how people live their lives or how services are accessed, reinforcing the case for reform around coherent, functional geographies that better align with communities and everyday patterns of need.

A two unitary model provides a platform to:

- Align strategic reform at scale with genuine local responsiveness
- Integrate service delivery across health, care, housing and community wellbeing
- Drive prevention and early intervention through locality-based governance
- Achieve sustainable efficiencies through workforce planning and data systems

The two new unitary councils will also be able work together to:

- Integrate service delivery
- Use shared intelligence
- Align budgets strategically
- Co-commission with partners
- Devolve decision-making

The two-unitary model balances scale and subsidiarity to accelerate reform across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Criterion 4 - Working together to understand and meet local needs

There has been a wide range of engagement on local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The councils across the area have taken a collaborative approach to an element of this engagement to ensure that stakeholders did not experience multiple and conflicting requests.

There are three phases to engagement on LGR:

Phase 1 – the awareness campaigns that have been undertaken by all the councils following the announcement on local government reorganisation in December 2024.
Phase 2 – the engagement with residents and stakeholders on priorities for local government reorganisation and emerging proposals.
Phase 3 – the statutory consultation led by Government which will be undertaken following the receipt of the final proposals from the local authorities which expected to take place in early 2026.

The outputs from the significant amount of engagement that has taken place across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has been to inform the Proposal:

- Engagement with stakeholders which was approached jointly by the Councils
- Residents’ engagement via focus groups undertaken by Staffordshire County Council
- Specific residents’ surveys undertaken by individual councils
- Engagement with the workforce
- Engagement with local councillors
- Consultation with town and parish councils

As this proposal involves a request for modification of the current council boundaries, specific work was commissioned to engage with the residents of the areas that would be directly impacted by the changes i.e. in the Uttoxeter area of the East Staffordshire Borough and the Stone area of Stafford Borough. This was supplemented by engagement with town and parish councils in those areas.

When considering the output from the wide range of engagement across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, six key priorities emerged from residents and stakeholders for the development of the structure of unitary local government in the areas which have been embedded in the proposal.

High quality services that reflect local needs
Value for money
Protecting local identity
Responsiveness/ability to adapt to local circumstances
Local decision making and accountability
Improved services and infrastructure

The engagement in the areas of Uttoxeter and Stone was a positive experience as the opportunity was used to outline the rationale behind the request for boundary modification. There was a degree of support for the proposal in the Uttoxeter area; Uttoxeter Town Council has gone as far as providing a letter of support. It was less well received however in the Stone Area. The Council is committed to continuing this engagement up until the Secretary of State’s decision and beyond if required.

The proposal also recognises the four significant opportunities for local government reorganisation identified by stakeholders and residents during the engagement process:

	Seizing the opportunity for devolution for the area
	Generating Efficiency Savings and Financial Sustainability
	Simplifying Structures and Service Improvements
	Strengthening Partnerships

Despite the extensive engagement across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, there remains a significant number of concerns:

	Loss of local identity due to the geographical coverage of the new unitary councils
	Disruption and continuity of service delivery during the transition
	Financial sustainability and resource allocation
	Loss of local representation and accountability
	Retention of rural identity and services due to the demands from urban areas

During many of the engagements with residents, concerns were constantly voiced about the impact of being amalgamated into a new unitary council alongside Stoke-on-Trent City Council. These views were driven by concerns about financial sustainability, given the financial challenges in Stoke-on-Trent. There were also worries about the distinct needs of different communities outside the city, with fears that rural areas could be neglected due to the complex challenges that will need to be tackled. Assurances about Stoke-on-Trent’s financial position to counter the perceptions of residents that it will be significantly detrimental to the financial sustainability of the North Staffordshire Unitary, will need to be communicated effectively during the reorganisation process.

The proposal sets out a level of assurance in addressing all the concerns raised, but there will be a need for ongoing community engagement and consultation all the way through to implementation in March 2028 and beyond to give assurance that these will be addressed.

Criterion 5 - Supporting future devolution arrangements

It is essential that any future reconfiguration of unitary councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent unlocks devolution to a Strategic Authority in the area.

The councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent recognise the benefits of devolution through devolved powers and funding and have confirmed a preferred option of a Strategic Authority based on the existing geography of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

As the area is not part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme and given the link between devolution and local government reorganisation set out in the English Devolution white paper, devolution in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is likely to follow local government reorganisation. The councils are however urging early discussions with the Government on the timescales for the consideration of a Strategic Authority for the area. Despite the differing views of the future configuration of the unitary local authorities in Staffordshire, the Councils are unified in their view that without devolution the area is 'being left behind' when compared to neighbouring areas with strategic authorities in place.

The two balanced unitary councils set out in this Proposal will support devolution by balancing ambitious regional collaboration with meaningful localised place leadership. It is recognised that the move to a unitary structure will provide a less complex pathway to the establishment of the new Strategic Authority

Collectively, the two new unitary councils and strategic authority would focus on priorities that address both regional and local challenges:

- Economic growth and productivity
- Investment in infrastructure and improving transportation networks
- Investing in the area's workforce, by strengthening alignment between businesses, skills and education and health services
- Joint approaches to housing development and the transformation of public services
- Investment in local capacity and capability through a new approach to community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

The preparation for devolution in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, and the subsequent creation of a new Strategic Authority, needs to be recognised in the design of the new unitary councils. This will ensure that structured regional strategic planning with strong local delivery will be in place to facilitate the creation of a Strategic Authority to provide economic growth and resilience for the area as a whole.

Given Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent neighbour several other existing strategic authorities (West Midlands, East Midlands and Greater Manchester, in addition to Cheshire from 2027), significant opportunities exist for collaboration with other regions.

Criterion 6 - Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

Democratic Representation

As the area moves to the unitary model where the local authorities operate on a much larger geographical footprint, local decision making and accountability is a priority for residents. The proposals for democratic representation have been carefully considered in this context. The Proposal sets out the indicative number of councillors for each of the two unitary councils and, although not required at this stage, indicative warding patterns,

and arrangements to give residents some assurance about the levels of local accountability.

These indicative proposals are based on the most recent boundary reviews of Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council. This results in complexity in the North Staffordshire Unitary due to the current difference in the levels of democratic representation of Staffordshire as a county council and Stoke-on-Trent as unitary authority.

Authority Name	Electors	No of Wards/ County Divisions	Council Size	Electors per Councillor	Electoral Cycle
Stoke-on-Trent	177,792	34	44	4,041	Whole
Staffordshire County Council	667,255	62	62	10,762	Whole

Considering all the requirements which will be placed on the membership of the new Councils it is proposed that:

North Staffordshire Council has a membership of 92 councillors.

Wards are based on leaving the former city council area unchanged and the other areas based on current 20 County Electoral Divisions becoming 2-member wards apart from 8 divisions becoming 3-member wards due to their size. The make up the new North Staffordshire Council will be:

Former Stoke-on-Trent City Council area 44 councillors in 34 wards

Former Newcastle Under Lyme BC area 20 councillors in 9 wards

Former Staffordshire Moorlands DC 18 councillors in 7 wards

Former Stafford BC area 6 councillors in 2 wards

Former East Staffordshire BC area 4 Councillors in 2 wards

Southern and Mid Staffordshire Council has a membership of 84 councillors.

This area can be based on current county Electoral Divisions with 42 Electoral Divisions that can remain in what will become the new unitary council. The most pragmatic approach to new electoral arrangements in this area is to create 42 2-member wards in the existing Electoral Divisions, which will provide for a new Council membership of 84 councillors in line with the council size proposals. The makeup of the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council will be:

- Former Cannock Chase DC area 14 Councillors in 7 wards
- Former East Staffordshire BC area 14 Councillors in 7 wards
- Former Lichfield DC area 16 Councillors in 8 wards
- Former South Staffordshire DC area 16 Councillors in 8 wards
- Former Stafford BC area 14 councillors in 7 wards
- Former Tamworth BC area 10 Councillors in 5 wards

Neighbourhood Governance and Empowerment

Establishing two unitary councils, North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Staffordshire, will ensure that decision-making, service delivery and prevention remain rooted in local communities, while maintaining the strategic scale needed for coherent, county-wide oversight.

It is proposed that, through Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs), aligned with NHS Neighbourhood Health initiatives (Integrated Local Care Teams (ILCTs), residents and partners will be empowered to shape services, address needs early and deliver outcomes that matter most to their communities.

The new unitary councils will build on the current two-tier area’s existing commitment to listening to residents, tailoring services to the needs of each community and preventing challenges before they escalate:

LISTEN	Residents’ voices are central to identifying local priorities and shaping service delivery. Engagement with communities, voluntary organisations and town and parish councils ensures decisions reflect lived experience
TAILOR	Services are designed to respond to the distinctive character, challenges and opportunities of each neighbourhood
PREVENT	Early intervention and proactive approaches reduce long-term demand on services, whether through addressing barriers to opportunity, supporting mental and physical wellbeing, improving housing, or tackling social isolation

These principles underpin the neighbourhood governance model proposed for the two new unitary councils, ensuring that engagement translates into accountability and action.

The model will building local power through four key elements:

Two unitary councils as strategic enablers
Each unitary council will provide the resources, capacity and leadership to support neighbourhood-level structures, such as NACs and INTs, ensuring services are locally responsive, preventative and aligned with resident priorities.
Neighbourhood Area Committees: local priorities, local accountability
The NAC structures adopted by both new unitary councils will ensure that residents, councillors, Town and Parish councils and local organisations have a direct role in shaping services and decisions in their communities. Each NAC will be tailored to the distinctive character of its area, recognising the industrial heritage, the historic market towns and the rural parishes across the county.
Integrated Neighbourhood Teams: Turning local priorities into action
Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will form the operational backbone of each unitary council’s neighbourhood governance model. Working within the footprints of NACs, INTs ensure that priorities, insights and aspirations identified by residents, councillors and local partners are translated into tangible, locally tailored action.
Partnership with Town and Parish councils and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) networks
The existing network of town and parish Councils and the vibrant VCSE sector form a critical foundation for neighbourhood governance across the two new unitary councils. These locally rooted organisations bring deep insight into community priorities, assets and challenges and their active participation is essential to realising the vision of empowered neighbourhoods under the two-unitary model. While parish coverage varies across the two-tier area, some areas are only partly parished, and places such as Stoke-on-Trent and Tamworth have no Town Councils; the model is designed to be flexible. In unparished areas, alternative mechanisms such as community forums, neighbourhood panels or resident partnerships will ensure representation and accountability are maintained.

Turning the vision of empowered, neighbourhood-focused councils into reality, the Proposal sets out a four-phase roadmap for implementing NACs and INTs. The roadmap provides a practical framework for moving from engagement to implementation; ensuring that local voice is not just heard but translated into action. Each phase has a distinct purpose: to design, test, scale and sustain neighbourhood governance and integrated delivery arrangements that reflect the diversity of each new unitary council’s communities.

Phase 1 - Co-design	Collaboratively design the framework for NAC and INTs, ensuring all community types; urban, rural and market town shape how neighbourhood governance will work in practice.
Phase 2 - Test and learn	Pilot and refine the NAC and INT model through Pathfinder areas, gathering insight on what works, strengthening accountability and testing devolved approaches before wider rollout.
Phase 3 - Scale across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	Expand successful models county-wide, embedding consistent engagement, devolved decision-making, and visible local accountability across all neighbourhoods.
Phase 4 - System integration and continuous improvement	Embed neighbourhood working as a core feature of each new unitary council’s governance and service delivery models, ensuring it continuously adapts to resident feedback, population change and emerging needs.

This four-phase roadmap provides a clear pathway from community engagement to delivery. It ensures that the two new unitary councils embed neighbourhood influence, integration, and prevention at every level of governance.

Implementing Local Government Reorganisation

A set of guiding principles outlined in the proposal to be used to develop the proposed operating model for the new unitary councils and support their effective implementation:

Customer focussed
Local accountability and decision making
Insight led
Sustainability
Digital first - inclusive by design
Outcome focussed
Empowerment
Collaboration

Implementation will require careful planning and delivery. Implementation plan set out in the proposal will have six phases:

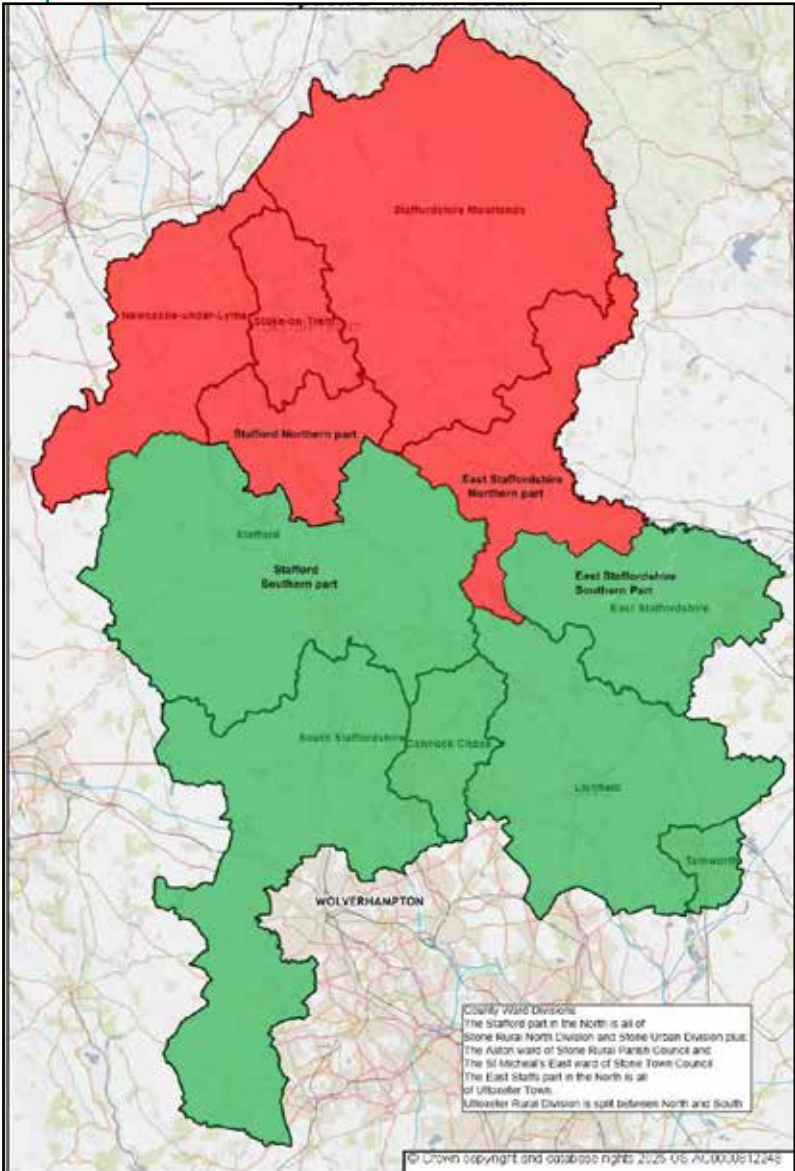
Phase 1 – Plan and define the requirements - prior to the Secretary of State’s decision
Phase 2 – Building the foundations – following the decision
Phase 3 – Mobilise the Shadow authority - following the shadow elections
Phase 4 – Leadership
Phase 5 – Go-live – 1st April 2028
Phase 6 – Extended transformation – April 2028 and beyond

The proposed governance arrangements during the implementation period are set out in the Proposal. The strategic oversight and direction will rest with the Staffordshire Leaders Board up until the Secretary of State’s decision. Post decision, Joint Committees will be established for each of the new unitary councils until the elections to the Shadow Authorities in May 2027.

Summary of the Proposal

The Proposal:

- Creates two balanced and financial resilient unitary councils
- Meets all the criteria for unitary local government
- Closely aligns with the economic geography of Staffordshire Stoke-on-Trent and the social connections of residents
- Provides the foundations for economic growth and housing delivery
- Is informed by significant resident and stakeholder engagement
- Produces significant financial savings and wider social and economic benefits which will be equally distributed across the area
- Requires a modification of existing boundaries but makes a compelling justification which offsets the marginally increased cost
- Sets out clear proposals for service delivery and wider public service reform which will result in positive outcomes for residents
- Provides for appropriate levels of democratic representation
- Proposes an innovative model for neighbourhood governance



Proposal



1

Background to Local Government Reorganisation

In the Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, the Government announced a programme of local government reorganisation (‘LGR’) for all remaining two-tier areas in England. This includes unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality public services. The core rationale is that the Government considers that unitary councils can lead to better outcomes for residents, save significant money which can be reinvested in public services, and improve accountability with fewer politicians who are more able to focus on delivering for residents.

In February 2025, within the provisions of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Secretary of State invited any of the principal authorities in each of the two-tier areas of England to submit a proposal to form a single tier of local government. The invitation is to all councils in the 21 two-tier areas and includes 19 “small neighbouring unitary authorities”. Interim plans had to be submitted to the government by 21st March 2025. The government “will take a phased approach” to implementation, considering where reorganisation can unlock devolution, with the new unitary councils planned for 2027 and 2028. The indicative timescale for LGR is set out in *Figure 1* below:

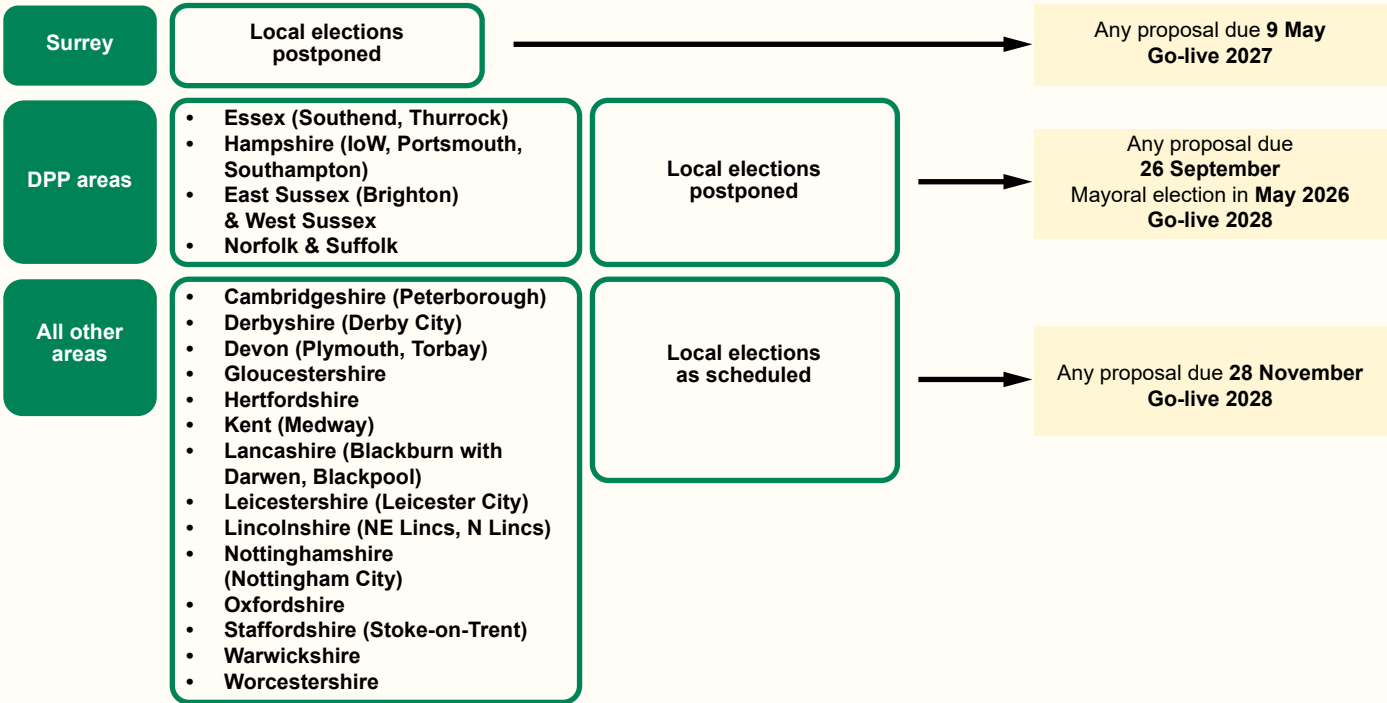


Figure 1: Indicative Timescale for LGR (Source: MHCLG)

The indicative LGR planning timelines for Staffordshire (and all the remaining 2-tier areas, other than Surrey and those areas included in the Devolution Priority Programme), are set out in **Figure 2**.

Date	Event
5th February 2025	Invitation to submit proposals
21st March 2025	Submission of interim LGR plan
28th November 2025	Submission of final LGR proposals
February 2026 to May 2026	Government led consultation on LGR proposals
July 2026	Government decision on proposals following consultation
September 2026 - December 2026	LGR legislation prepared and laid
May 2027	Necessary transitional legislation prepared and laid Shadow unitary elections
April 2028	New unitary councils go-live

Figure 2: LGR Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Indicative Timelines (Source: MHCLG)

The Secretary of State can also choose to refer a proposal to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) and then can choose to implement the proposal (with or without modifications), implement alternative proposals made by the LGBCE, or take no action.

If the Secretary of State decides to make an order for local government reorganisation, it must be approved by a vote by both houses of parliament to take effect. Reorganisation in an area does not require the consent of all the affected local authorities.

2 Aims, Approach and Structure of the Proposal

Aims

Local government reorganisation provides the opportunity to transform how services are delivered to meet the diverse needs of residents and businesses in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The case for unitary local government rests on arguments for greater efficiency, cost savings, and improved service delivery. Unitary authorities, where a single council is responsible for all local government functions, are often presented as a way to streamline services, reduce bureaucracy, and make local government more accountable to residents.

With a backdrop of rising demand for public services, economic pressures and financial constraints, there are significant opportunities to provide greater value for money with less bureaucracy and duplication. However, it is essential that the challenges are acknowledged, service delivery is not compromised, and the focus remains on meeting and responding to local needs and aspirations, democratic accountability, and the need for enhanced local leadership.

The local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent recognise the benefits of devolution through devolved powers and funding and have confirmed a preferred option of a Strategic Authority based on the existing geography of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is not part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme and, given the link between devolution and local government set out in the English Devolution white paper, devolution in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is likely to follow local government reorganisation. The proposal has been developed in anticipation that the new unitary structure will unlock the benefits of devolution.

Approach

This proposal has been developed through a three-stage process:

- **Stage One** – a high-level options assessment which identified a small number of shortlisted options for reorganisation of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- **Stage Two** – an outline options appraisal that set the foundational vision and identified a preferred option
- **Stage Three** – full options appraisal and development of the detailed proposal, refined through data analysis and significant stakeholder engagement

Comprehensive research and analysis of national and local datasets have been key to the development and evaluation of options. Key data sources have included local authority financial and service delivery metrics, demographic, deprivation, health, and economic profiles. These have helped to understand local needs and fully assess the potential impact of different options. Information sourced from local government support organisations such as the Local Government Association and District Councils Network has been used to inform the proposal, along with the lessons from other areas that have progressed LGR.

The views of residents and a range of stakeholders have been key to shaping the proposal, ensuring that it is informed by local views and experience.

Evaluation Criteria and Feedback on Interim Plans

The criteria for unitary local government set out by the Secretary of State in the invitation to submit proposals have been central to the assessment of the options and the development of this proposal; these are summarised in *Figure 3*.

Single tier of local government for the whole area

Sensible geography and economic areas
Appropriate tax base
Increase housing supply and meet local needs
Supported by robust evidence identifying outcomes

Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks

Population of c500k
Improved councils' finances and best value for taxpayers
Transition costs and future transformation
Managing council debt

Stronger community engagement and empowerment

Outlining how communities will be engaged
Enabling strong community engagement

High quality and sustainable public services

Improved service delivery
Delivering public service reform
Manage social care, SEND and homelessness
Wider public services including public safety

Supporting devolution arrangements

How it helps unlock devolution
Sensible local authority population size ratios

Understand and meet local needs

Meaningful and constructive local engagement
Ensure local identity/cultural and historic importance
Clear evidence of local engagement
Demonstrating how concerns will be addressed

Figure 3: Criteria for Unitary Local Government
(Source: MHCLG)

Feedback on the interim plans that were submitted to MHCHG was received on 3rd June 2025. The feedback provided related to all the interim plans submitted by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent local authorities. The aim of the feedback on interim plans was to support areas to develop final proposals. This feedback has been used to inform the development of this Proposal.

Collaboration

Since the publication of the Devolution White Paper and the subsequent invitation by the Secretary of State to submit proposals for local government reorganisation, all ten councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have been considering their position and preferred option.

The preferred position of each of the ten local authorities has been discussed at the Staffordshire Chief Executives Group and the Staffordshire Leaders Board.

A draft Interim Plan for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent was prepared by the Chief Executives and approved by the Staffordshire Leaders Board for submission to Government in March. Nine of the ten Council Leaders supported and signed the plan.

The Interim Plan set out the two main emerging options which at that time were:

- A two-unitary structure combining the county council and all district and borough councils into one new unitary council for the current Staffordshire administrative area. The existing Stoke-on-Trent City Council unitary would remain on its current boundaries.
- Two new unitary councils, one for Northern Staffordshire covering as a **minimum** the

current borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, the district of Staffordshire Moorlands and the city of Stoke-on-Trent, and the creation of a complementary Southern Staffordshire unitary covering the district of Lichfield, the district of Cannock Chase, the borough of East Staffordshire, the district of South Staffordshire the borough of Tamworth and the borough of Stafford.

The interim plan did recognise that other options may well emerge and made clear the intention to work collaboratively to explore these alongside the two main options.

The Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council Leader did not support the plan and consequently did not commit to sign it. Consequently, Newcastle-under-

Lyme submitted its own Interim Plan. Following the agreement of the pan-Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Interim Plan, the six districts in the South of Staffordshire (Lichfield, Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, South Staffordshire, Tamworth, and Stafford) submitted their own Interim Plan. Following this, Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council also submitted supplementary interim plans.

The Interim Plans submitted to government on 21st March indicated the preferred options of the nine other councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent at that time. These are set out in *Figure 4*.

Authority	LGR Position (Preferred Options at Interim Plan Stage)
Stoke-on-Trent City Council Stafford Borough Council Cannock Chase District Council Lichfield District Council Tamworth Borough Council East Staffordshire Borough Council South Staffordshire Borough Council	Two Unitary Councils: North Staffordshire (Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent); and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire (Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford, Tamworth)
Staffordshire County Council	Two Unitary Councils Staffordshire (existing geography); and Stoke-on-Trent (unchanged)
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council	Unitary Council model covering the current Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough area (although several additional options were under consideration)
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Considering all options with a view to establishing a preferred option in July 2025

Figure 4: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Councils Preferred Options for LGR at Interim Plan Stage (Source: Interim Plans)

Since submission of the interim plans there here have been several changes to both the local and national context including:

- The experience of local government reorganisation submissions in Surrey on 9th May 2025, and those areas within the

Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) which were submitted on 26th September 2025 and showed that a variety of models for LGR delivery could be brought forward for consideration by Government – with no area submitting a single submission for their invitational area

- The election of a new political administration for Staffordshire County Council, which revised the County Council's previous position for a single unitary model to a new preferred option of a two-unitary council model on an East-West footprint covering the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- The confirmation of the preferred options of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
- The revision of the preferred option of Lichfield District Council, Tamworth Borough Council and South Staffordshire Borough Council to a three unitary council model

There are five proposals which are to be submitted to MHCLG by the 10 local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent which are summarised in *Figure 5*.

Authority	LGR Position (Preferred Options at Interim Plan Stage)
Stoke-on-Trent City Council Stafford Borough Council Cannock Chase District Council East Staffordshire Borough Council	Two Unitary Councils: North Staffordshire (Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent); and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire (Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford, Tamworth)
Lichfield District Council Tamworth Borough Council South Staffordshire Borough Council	Three Unitary Councils: North Staffordshire (Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent). South-West Staffordshire (Cannock Chase, South Staffordshire, Stafford); and South-East Staffordshire (East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Tamworth)
Staffordshire County Council	Two Unitary Councils: Staffordshire East (East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent, Tamworth); and Staffordshire West (Cannock Chase, Newcastle-under-Lyme, South Staffordshire, Stafford)
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council	Four Unitary Councils: Newcastle-under-Lyme North-East Staffordshire (Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent). South-West Staffordshire (Cannock Chase, South Staffordshire, Stafford); and South-East Staffordshire (East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Tamworth).
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Two Unitary Councils: North Staffordshire (East Staffordshire (part), Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford (part)); and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire (Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire (part), Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford (part), Tamworth).

Figure 5: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Councils Preferred Options for LGR at Proposal Submission Stage

The work required to develop these five proposals has been undertaken independently, and given the competitive nature of the process, the willingness to fully share detailed evidence has been limited.

However, the principle of establishing a shared evidence base was agreed early in the process by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Councils. The development of all the proposals has been data-led, grounded through research, constructive dialogue, and strong local engagement. Where possible, all the Councils have worked together effectively to ensure that data and information is shared, and the evidence base is accurate, robust, and consistent between the proposals.

Boundary Modification

The Secretary of State provided further guidance to set out the position regarding Boundary Changes. It confirmed that existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for proposals, but where there is a strong justification, more complex boundary changes will be considered.

For proposals that provide for new unitary councils that split current district boundaries, further guidance specifies that they should use district building blocks as a best fit, with a request that the Secretary of State considers the use of modification powers to split the districts to achieve the final desired outcome. It would then require the following ministerial actions to implement:

- Consultation on the proposal and the requested modification
- Ministerial choice whether to seek advice from the LGBCE on the revised boundaries put forward
- Decision to implement a modified proposal



This Proposal has a Base Proposal of two unitary councils using the district and borough boundaries as the building blocks:

- **North Staffordshire** (Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands, Stoke-on-Trent); and
- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire** (Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford, Tamworth)

The final Proposal includes a request for the modification of the boundaries of parts of East Staffordshire and Stafford Boroughs to be included in the proposed North Staffordshire Unitary Council. Justification for this request is set out in the proposal.

Structure of the Proposal

This proposal is structured as follows:

- A description of the challenges and opportunities for improving local government services in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- The vision and principles for the future system of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- An outline of the process undertaken to assess the options and key considerations used to develop the proposal
- An analysis of the options available for local government reorganisation

- The case for the Base Proposal (using existing district building blocks) for two new unitary councils (North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire), including demonstrating that this meets the criteria for unitary local government established by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- A request for a modification to the existing district and borough boundaries that will improve the Base Proposal, including an outline for the justification for the modification
- A detailed analysis of the Modified Proposal that demonstrates how the criteria for unitary local government are met and highlights the benefits of the proposed two unitary council approach
- Details of proposals for implementation including transitional arrangements, governance, and community engagement
- A high-level risk analysis and arrangements for risk management and contingency planning

3 Challenges/Opportunities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Staffordshire is located in the centre of England, covering a geography of approximately 1,046 square miles. The county borders Cheshire in the North, Derbyshire and Leicestershire to the East, Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Birmingham and the West Midlands to the South and Shropshire to the West.

The administrative county of Staffordshire surrounds the city of Stoke-on-Trent, which is in the North of the county. The city is a federation of six original towns: Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton, and Longton. The city is world-famous as “The Potteries” or the “Ceramic Capital of the World,” the birthplace of England’s pottery industry. Renowned brands like Wedgwood, Spode, and Minton originated here.

In addition to its urban centres, Staffordshire features high hills and moorlands, including part of the Peak District National Park, and the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It also has an extensive network of canals that historically supported its industries.

Challenges and Opportunities of Local Government Reorganisation

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have an abundance of strengths, but as with all areas of the country, its existing local authorities face several strategic challenges. Local government reorganisation presents opportunities to tackle a number of these issues. Change of this scale also brings a set of specific challenges that need to be navigated to ensure successful implementation and the

maximisation of opportunities for short, medium and long-term benefits for the communities of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Complexities of Service Delivery

The area comprises the city of Stoke-on-Trent and eight district and boroughs: Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Newcastle-under-Lyme, South Staffordshire, Stafford, Staffordshire Moorlands and Tamworth.



Figure 6: Administrative Boundaries of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

There is a varied contrast of communities across the area, from the high-density urban area of Stoke on-Trent along with other urban centres across the area, to the rural areas of South Staffordshire, Staffordshire Moorlands, large parts of East Staffordshire and the parts Stafford Borough in the West of the county. The population of each of the local authority areas and the extent of its rurality is set out in **Table 1**.

Authority	Population (2021 Census)	Population Density (per square mile)	Settlement Classification	Proportion of population in rural Output Areas
				%
Cannock Chase	100,500	3,350.0	Urban	10.4
East Staffordshire	124,000	832.2	Intermediate urban	21.6
Lichfield	106,400	831.3	Intermediate urban	27.5
Newcastle-under-Lyme	123,300	1,522.2	Urban	19.1
South Staffordshire	110,500	703.8	Intermediate rural	41.5
Stafford	136,800	592.2	Intermediate urban	29.4
Staffordshire Moorlands	95,800	431.5	Intermediate urban	31.0
Tamworth	78,600	6,550.0	Urban	0
Stoke-on-Trent	258,400	7,177.8	Urban	0.2

Table 1 Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent - Population Density and Rurality (Source: ONS)

The majority of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent residents live in urban areas. However, there are still more residents in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent living in rural areas than the regional and national averages. The significant areas of rurality are illustrated in *Figure 7*.

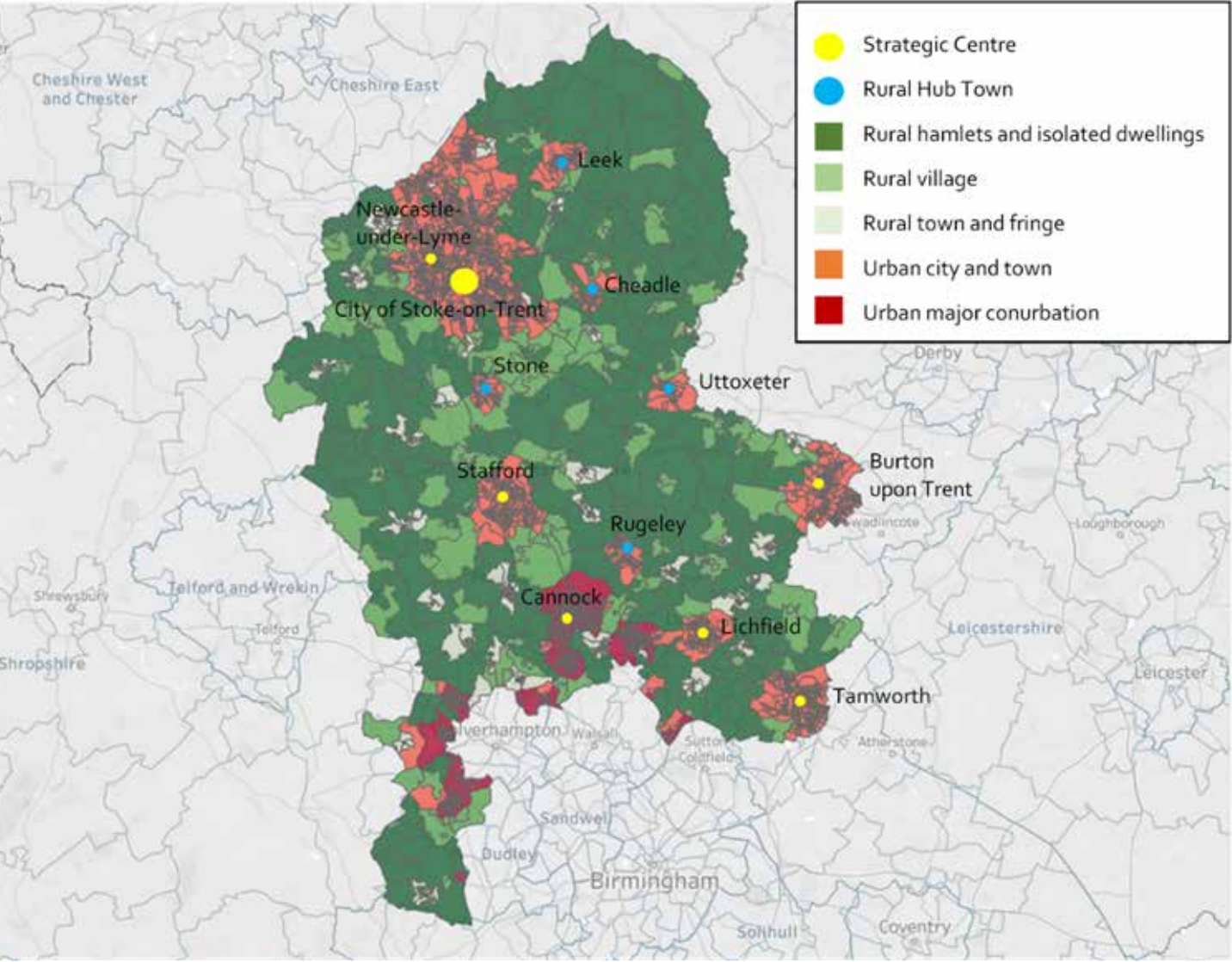


Figure 7: Rural Staffordshire Lower-layer Super Output Areas (Source: Staffordshire Rural Economic Strategy: 2023-2030)

This variation has significant implications for service design across the new unitary councils. The urban areas have higher population densities and higher levels of and more concentrated deprivation, which results in a greater demand for social care services. The rural areas in Staffordshire have a significant ageing population, which necessitates different service delivery models. Rural areas also have public transport limitations and accessibility challenges. The future unitary councils must balance investment between urban regeneration and infrastructure improvements while ensuring rural communities have equitable access to employment and essential services.

Tackling Deprivation

Levels of deprivation across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are lower than many areas in the West Midlands and England, but there is significant localised deprivation and inequality. **Table 2** shows the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranking of the existing councils in Staffordshire. Stoke-on-Trent is amongst the most deprived Local Authorities in England, ranked 14th most deprived out of 317 local authority areas for the overall Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). According to the most recent figures, 53% of people in the city live in areas which are classified as being in the top 20% most deprived LSOAs in England. Across Staffordshire, despite having a lower ranking, Tamworth, East Staffordshire, Cannock Chase, and Newcastle-under-Lyme all have over 10% of their LSOAs ranked among the 20% most deprived in England. In contrast, South Staffordshire has no areas in this category, and in Stafford and Lichfield, at least a third of LSOAs are ranked within the two least deprived deciles nationally.

Local Authority District name (2019)	IMD - Rank of average score	IMD - Rank of proportion of LSOAs in most deprived 10% nationally	IMD 2019 - Rank of extent	IMD 2019 - Rank of local concentration
Cannock Chase	134	144	138	148
East Staffordshire	147	132	129	153
Lichfield	247	195	218	219
Newcastle-under-Lyme	151	153	146	155
South Staffordshire	239	195	248	243
Stafford	230	195	198	199
Staffordshire Moorlands	206	195	196	191
Tamworth	126	98	126	113
Stoke-on-Trent	14	12	12	35

Table 2: Staffordshire Councils Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 (Source: MHCLG)

Understanding deprivation patterns helps local authorities anticipate social care pressures and allocate resources more effectively. Social care services are specifically tailored to the specific needs of each local authority area and services are shaped accordingly. Given the different challenges faced in the predominantly urban Stoke-on-Trent and mixed urban/rural service challenges in the rest of Staffordshire, the service delivery models of Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council are tailored accordingly. These social care services are regulated and are subject to rigorous review, which ensures that they are managed effectively for their respective populations. The challenge of the creation of new models for social care delivery that reflect the new demands in the new unitary councils will need to be carefully considered and be a priority in the transition to the new unitary councils

Supporting the Economy

While much of the county remains agricultural (with a high instance of dairy farming), other industries present in the county include several major international manufacturers, such as JCB, Jaguar Land Rover, and GE Vernova, alongside many smaller enterprises, as well as a renowned brewing heritage in Burton upon Trent. Ceramics remains a significant industry with Wedgwood, Steelite International, Portmeirion and Lucideon operating in the North of the county. Beyond ceramics, the city of Stoke-on-Trent has a strong industrial past in coal mining and steel production, and as these heavy industries have declined, the economy has diversified into service industries, distribution, and a growing digital and advanced manufacturing sector.





Tourism is a significant and growing sector. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has several major visitor attractions including the Alton Towers Resort, the National Memorial Arboretum, the award-winning Trentham Gardens and Monkey Forest, and historic sites like Lichfield Cathedral. Major Stoke-on-Trent visitor attractions include museums like the Gladstone Pottery Museum, the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, and active factory sites like Emma Bridgewater and Middleport Pottery.

The area performs well overall when using business survival metrics. The survival rate of over 40% is comparatively higher than the national average and significantly higher than the West Midlands regional rate of 35%. Within the county, there are areas where there is a high concentration of micro-businesses. In Staffordshire Moorlands, 92% of business have fewer than 10 employees, which demonstrates its reliance on its entrepreneurial character.

Productivity levels are below average across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, with GVA per hour worked lower than both regional and national averages. Similarly, median annual gross pay in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is lower than regional and national levels.

There has been a need to move away from the development of traditional skills required to provide local businesses with a qualified workforce. The area continues to respond to the needs for more advanced skills, including manufacturing, engineering and digital skills. Shared education and skills infrastructure, including University of Staffordshire and Keele University, will need to support the further development of those skills needed across many current and future industries. The skills levels of residents in several areas, including Stoke-on-Trent and Cannock Chase, continue to be a challenge. In Stoke-on-Trent, the number of residents with no qualifications is more than double the national average.

The new unitary councils will need to build on the current strengths in the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent economy but also continue to support and address its challenges. A weak economy with lower income levels and low levels of productivity are linked to poorer health outcomes and higher crime rates, which in turn have an impact on the demand for local authority services.

As outlined in the white paper, the creation of unitary authorities will be a key component to unlocking devolution for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The creation of Unitary Councils on a scale comparable to major metropolitan areas like Greater Manchester will facilitate the strategic focus and strength required to develop the new Strategic Authority.

The new unitary structure, alongside a new Strategic Authority, will facilitate better leverage of regional opportunities, secure vital resources, and help shape policies that strengthen devolution for the benefit of the local economy.

Demographic Challenges

Approximately 1.1m people live in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in c.520,000 properties. ONS Mid-Year Population forecasts show that the average age of residents is 42.3, varying from 38.8 in Stoke-on-Trent, to 46.3 in Staffordshire Moorlands. The rate at which the population is growing varies across the county. 2021 Census data shows that while the population of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent had grown by 3.4% since the 2011 census, the rate of growth varied significantly, ranging from the highest level of growth of 9.2% in East Staffordshire to a 1.3% reduction in Staffordshire Moorlands.

The population is expected to continue to increase, but a significant challenge is the changing age profile of the population, with a reduction in the number of under 18s, a modest increase in the working age population, and substantial growth in the older population. These significant demographic shifts present complex challenges for the strategic planning of the new unitary councils. An ageing

population is likely to result in increased demand on health and social care services, housing, and resident support requirements. It also impacts on local businesses as the proportion of working-age residents reduces.

Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council are already having to deal with rising demand for adult social care, which is creating a challenging environment for their capacity to deliver high-quality care services. This increasing pressure is a significant issue in Stoke-on-Trent, with demand levels exceeding regional and national averages.

The demographic profile of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is complex as there are many variances across the communities in the area. **Appendix A** provides a summary of the demographic profile across the city of Stoke-on-Trent and the eight district and borough areas.

This analysis identifies the complexities of the varying circumstances in each of the areas. This is even more complicated as the administrative boundaries of each of the individual local authorities contain several unique and diverse communities.

For example, strategic planning at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has been underpinned by detailed locality analysis. The purpose of this work has been to ensure a full understanding of the relevance of key issues relating to different localities in the district. Strategic planning is informed by locality profiles of six larger localities that share certain characteristics as shown in **Figure 8**. Parishes are grouped into localities based on:

- A high-level understanding of how different places in the district relate to each other
- A wider perspective of key needs in different parts of the district, and
- The data analysis itself and the similarities this helped identify



Figure 8 – Localities in Staffordshire Moorlands

These locality profiles are regularly refreshed, and the specific needs of different localities are considered through:

- The identification and analysis of relevant and available ward-level data to understand differences between different localities in the district and in comparison, to England as a whole
- Desk research to provide context for the data-based picture that emerges
- An analysis of local priorities and ambitions at the town and parish council level

The other local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will have similar approaches for identifying the particular needs of individual localities. It will be an important consideration in the design of the new unitary councils to ensure that locality issues are not overlooked.

Financial Sustainability

Local Government Reorganisation provides a significant opportunity to improve the financial sustainability of local government. Local government finance in England currently faces significant challenges, with local authorities struggling to balance rising costs and increased service demands with a funding system that has not kept pace with these pressures. Recent reports from the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) have observed that, while there have been real terms increases in funding since 2019/20, local government funding per resident currently remains below 2010 levels, leading to increasing financial pressures.

The financial challenges in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent include:

- **Rising costs:** High levels of inflation have resulted in increased costs of delivering services, which is squeezing budgets of all the local authorities
- **Increasing service demand:** The growing and aging population are increasing the demand for services, putting pressure on local authorities to provide more with the same or reduced resources. This is a particular challenge for Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council who have the responsibilities for delivering social care services
- **Outdated Funding System:** The current local government finance system has not been significantly reformed since 2013/14, leaving councils operating in a dated and patched-up system. This is a significant challenge for Stoke-on-Trent City Council, who have a low council tax base with limited opportunity to raise revenue
- **Dependency on council tax:** Reliance on council tax, with valuations 30 years out of date, and grant funding that does not account

for differences in local needs, means that council tax is becoming increasingly unfit for purpose

- **Reductions in Grant Funding:** Many councils have seen reductions in grant funding, further exacerbating their financial pressures. This is a significant challenge for the upper-tier authorities who have a significant reliance on government financial support
- **Wage Inflation:** The recent spike in wage inflation has also contributed to the financial challenges faced by all the local councils
- **Debt:** The legacy of debt management is becoming an increasing challenge, particularly with the requirement to request capitalisation directions to fund revenue financial shortfalls

These pressures are resulting in several consequences for the local authorities:

- **Reduced Spending on Non-Statutory Services:** Councils are having to make difficult decisions to consider redirecting funding towards statutory services, particularly social care, and away from non-statutory services
- **Increased Fees and Charges:** Councils are raising fees and charges across a wide range of services to maximise income and address funding gaps
- **Use of Reserves:** The local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are having to rely on drawing down reserves to address short-term financial pressures, which could have long-term consequences for financial sustainability

It is difficult to ascertain the precise medium term financial position of each local authority in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent at the LGR implementation date and how amalgamating them into the new unitary structure will impact the financial outlook of the new authorities. The levels

of funding, the medium-term financial outlook, unit cost analysis and importantly the levels of debt will need to be carefully managed during the transition period.

Financial modelling, analysis and forecasting will also need to consider the potential impact of the Fair Funding Review 2.0, alongside other key areas of funding reform such as special educational needs and disability funding. Although the impact of these reforms is not clear at this stage, it is anticipated that these reforms will have a positive impact on the financial sustainability of the local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

At this stage, any proposal for LGR needs to demonstrate that the new unitary structure will provide for financially sustainable local government in the whole of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent area. The feedback on the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Interim Plans provided by MHCLG reiterates that any proposals need to recognise that Stoke-on-Trent City Council is in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and proposals will need to demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole, including Stoke-on-Trent, on a more sustainable footing. This is a significant challenge which needs to be carefully considered.

EFS is a temporary measure where the government provides financial assistance to local councils facing significant financial difficulties. It allows councils to manage budget shortfalls and continue providing essential services while developing a sustainable long-term financial plan. Its purpose is to help councils avoid facing Section 114 notices, which are issued when a council is facing a financial crisis and may require intervention from the government or central government oversight.

EFS involves the government providing councils with access to borrowing or allowing them to use the proceeds from asset sales to cover immediate financial pressures. This allows them to fund day-to-day operations and services, which are usually funded through revenue, while still being able to

make long-term commitments for capital projects.

EFS is a short-term measure, and councils are expected to use the support to address their immediate financial problems and work towards a sustainable long-term financial strategy. There are conditions attached to EFS, primarily being subject to an external assurance review to ensure that the council's financial situation is being addressed effectively.

Table 3 illustrates the level of EFS received by Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

Year	Amount of EFS Received
	£m
2023/24	20.5
2024/25	21.7
2025/26	16.8

Table 3: Stoke-on-Trent City Council Level of Exception Financial Support (EFS) (Source: MHCLG)

The latest external assurance review, published in September 2024, raises no significant concerns, and it can be concluded that the City Council is making satisfactory progress with its long-term financial planning.

The implementation of local government reorganisation will result in significant financial savings with the anticipation of a relatively short payback period. A single unitary authority can potentially reduce duplication of services, administrative overheads, and management costs compared to a two-tier system. Various studies suggest that there are potential savings of millions of pounds annually through unitary restructuring.

The specified size of new unitary councils set out in the criteria for local government reorganisation is centred around developing new unitary councils that are large enough to ensure financial sustainability. This criterion has created a significant debate in local government networks. There are many reports and reviews that have been published over

decades on the question of the optimum size of a local authority. Some of these have been carried out by academic organisations, others have been commissioned by special interest groups.

It is understood that the Government guidance is primarily based on the County Council Network (CCN) commissioned report by PWC '[Evaluating the Importance of Scale in proposals for local government reorganisation](#)', which was published in 2020. It should be noted that the principal focus of this report is on the generation of efficiencies through economies of scale and ensuring the ease and constraining the cost of implementation.

The proposals for local government reorganisation need to be guided by the 500,000-population requirement set out in the criteria. However, there are other important considerations in determining the most appropriate option, over and above economies of scale. There are specific reports that set out other important considerations, including

- [Shared Intelligence Learning the Lessons from Local Government Reorganisation](#) published in 2016 - which recognises that there should be a balance between economies of scale, a sense of place and identity, and coherence of economic geography
- District Council Networks (DCN) commissioned report [Bigger Is Still Not Better](#) by Colin Copus published 2022 - which presents evidence to show that increasing the size of local government is no guarantee of improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and cost reduction. The powers, freedoms, capacity for action, skills and ability of local political leaders, councillors and officers; and the freedoms and autonomy of local government and its resources are also important factors in improving local efficiency, effectiveness, and cost reduction

Beyond the immediate financial gains from local government reorganisation, there is the potential that the new, more effective structures will provide further opportunities for value creation and

sustained financial health.

Developing the new unitary council structure will require the initial investment in the transition to be designed to reduce waste and duplication in the long run, leading to more efficient use of public funds. A focus on 'digital first, inclusive by design' principles have the potential to provide the platform to deliver significant additional longer-term efficiency gains over and above those that will accrue in the early years of operation. Taking the opportunity to develop strategies to harmonise council tax and manage debt effectively at an early stage will further strengthen the financial resilience needed to withstand broader economic shocks and uncertainty.

Transition Investment

It is recognised that reorganising local government into unitary authorities will involve significant one-off costs associated with restructuring and implementation.

These one-off transition costs need to be put into the context of the overall **£1.9 billion** gross spending of the 10 Staffordshire Councils. Positioned alongside the potential for wider public sector reform across the Staffordshire footprint, there is considerable scope for investing strategically to deliver improved outcomes for local people in critical areas such as health, skills, employment and housing.

There are two significant challenges to funding these transition costs:

- There is limited central government funding to meet the transition costs, and the expectation is that these costs will be met from the existing council resources
- A significant proportion of the transition investment will be early in the process, including a significant amount to mobilise the new unitary councils

It is likely that the existing local authorities will need to seek a capitalisation direction to enable the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund the transition to the single tier Unitary Councils, securing the financial sustainability of the new authorities from day one and ensuring the ability of current authorities to maintain services is not jeopardised by the one-off transition costs.

Asset Rationalisation

The 10 principal local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent hold a significant portfolio of operational and commercial assets. The development of a structured approach to strategic asset management, underpinned by technology including asset rationalisation, will generate significant financial savings to reinvest in frontline services.

Asset rationalisation will also support the wider growth and housing agenda by enabling the repurposing of buildings and land for development opportunities.

Workforce Harmonisation

The creation of new unitary councils is an opportunity to develop organisations which people want to work for, investing in improving the skills of employees, and ultimately increasing the quality of services to residents.

Like many local authorities across the country, the councils are experiencing recruitment challenges across a range of teams, including environmental health, planning, legal services and social care, with Staffordshire councils often competing with each other to recruit and retain staff. Local government reorganisation will provide an opportunity to eliminate this local competition.

All councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are committed to making local government a desirable career choice, a place where individuals can build fulfilling and impactful professional lives. The Local Government Association and the District Councils' Network have both considered

the importance of structural clarity as a magnet for attracting and retaining staff in local government, and reorganisation has the potential to re-establish the sector as a viable and rewarding career. The reorganisation needs to be designed to fundamentally transform perceptions of local government employment, positioning it as a modern, forward-thinking, and highly rewarding career path that attracts and retains the best talent.

A proactive approach to talent development will be central to creating dynamic and supportive work environments. In the medium and long term, there are also significant opportunities for workforce development underpinned by technology and AI.

Moving from 10 to two councils could also facilitate more opportunities for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across the collective workforce. At present, many district and borough councils are too small to sustain colleague support networks for protected characteristics such as disability, race or age. Larger unitary councils will be able to develop



thriving networks which could be used as a basis for wider engagement, development and support, thereby maximising talent and meeting the diverse needs of communities. The new unitary councils will need to develop an inclusive and supportive culture to create an environment where everyone feels valued, can thrive, and sees local government as a place where they belong.

A key challenge during the transition period will be the ability to retain and recruit the staff needed to provide high quality services and support the transition to the new unitary councils. Recruitment, retention and mutual aid strategies will need to be established to ensure that the Councils have the leadership and critical skills, knowledge and experience to successfully negotiate the transition, while maintaining continuity and quality of current public service provision.

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and High Peak Borough Council have formally worked together as part of a Strategic Alliance since 2008. As part of the Strategic Alliance, which spans two different counties and regions, the councils employ a shared workforce which delivers all services to residents across each council area. The councils have also established three council-controlled companies to deliver frontline services to their residents, in partnership with Cheshire East Council (in respect of Alliance Environmental Services Ltd for waste management, grounds maintenance and street scene services) and Norse Consulting Ltd (in respect of Alliance Norse Ltd for capital works and building and tenancy repairs/maintenance). The third Council controlled company, Alliance Leisure Ltd, acts as Agent for the Councils in the management of their leisure centres. The process of disaggregating the employment status of the shared workforce will be a significant complexity in implementing any LGR proposal across Staffordshire and Derbyshire, as will the transfer of the Councils' existing shareholdings in each Council controlled company to the newly



created Unitary Councils. Close coordination of timelines in reorganisation between Staffordshire and Derbyshire and will also be required to avoid service disruption for the communities currently served by these Councils.

Redefining and Aligning Services

Local government reorganisation presents a significant opportunity to simplify service delivery. Residents and businesses are often frustrated by having to deal with multiple councils and will find it easier to navigate a single point of contact for local services. By removing the confusion, duplication and inconsistencies which are inherent within a two-tier system, the navigation of key public services for our communities can be radically simplified while retaining the ability to tailor services to the needs of local areas. From the urban centres of Stoke-on-Trent to the market towns and rural villages, local delivery can match local needs with neighbourhood governance arrangements, ensuring that local voices continue to shape local service delivery and community engagement.

An area for initial focus will be the alignment of policy. Learning from other areas that have progressed through the LGR journey suggests that the time required for harmonisation of hundreds of policies, associated guidance and terms and conditions can be lengthy. Early engagement between Councils will be critical to this process.

Place Leadership and Strategic Partnerships

The larger scale of the new unitary councils and increased financial resilience will create a significant opportunity for strategic partnerships with national organisations. For example, a refreshed relationship with Homes England would enable the pooling of resources and access to larger funding to deliver new and affordable housing. A collective approach will effectively turbocharge the delivery of new social housing and facilitate more ambitious housing development projects across the area.

The process for the development of local government reorganisation proposals in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has involved significant engagement with strategic partners. During this early engagement, partner agencies from a range of sectors identified the need to focus on positive outcomes and impacts, and co-developing a vision, strategies and policies for the new Councils to help create the conditions for residents and businesses to thrive.

There is the potential for the creation of unitary authorities to disrupt existing relationships and partnerships within communities. The existing smaller, more localised councils may have a better understanding of specific community needs compared to larger unitary authorities. This needs to be considered in the design of the new authorities. It is also essential that there is a commitment to continue the dialogue with partners at all levels during the transition period to support effective implementation.

Local government reorganisation is likely to result in the demise of Staffordshire County Council. Working with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, the county council currently plays an important role in promoting the county on the regional, national and global stage. It is important that the pan-Staffordshire outlook continues, and the new unitary councils work closely together in the interests of benefitting the whole county at local, regional, national and international levels. Given the reduced scale when compared to the existing county council, the new unitary councils will need to have the ambition and financial resources to 'punch their weight' in these spaces. This will continue to build the foundations for and ease the transition into a new Strategic Authority for the area.

Representation and Accountability

New unitary authorities will be better positioned to make strategic decisions about their area, particularly in relation to where responsibilities are currently shared between the two-tiers e.g. economic development and growth, which will provide for enhanced local decision making. This will also provide the opportunity to improve accountability. With fewer tiers of local government, it will be clearer who is responsible for what, potentially making it easier for residents to hold their elected councillors accountable.

Reducing the number of councils and therefore reducing the number of councillors in principal authorities naturally raises concerns about local representation and the potential for a democratic deficit. The principal councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent currently have 438 elected representatives (62 county councils, 44 city councillors and 332 district and borough councillors).



This will reduce significantly in the new unitary structure. In developing proposals for the number of councillor representatives that are required in the new unitary councils, strategic capacity, the ability to effectively manage Council business, and having the capacity to effectively engage in partnerships will all be important considerations. However, importantly, the new unitary councils will need to ensure that there is a good level of representation and strong processes of engagement with electors to ensure that there is adequate democratic accountability. Council size, warding patterns and governance arrangements, and member support issues all need to be carefully considered.

The Government's consultative approach to developing neighbourhood-based approaches to local decision making and service delivery is welcomed. This will need to ensure that local needs are understood and acted upon and mitigate the loss of significant numbers of elected representatives. It is important that the new unitary councils and their predecessor councils work with

the Government to design Neighbourhood Area Committees that see local people, communities and partners, working alongside local area councillors to identify and deliver on local priorities and provide local accountability.

There are 195 Town and Parish and councils within Staffordshire, and they have an excellent understanding of local needs and aspirations. This local knowledge is essential to ensure that services respond to the needs of local people and help to improve the lives for everybody in Staffordshire. There will be a need to ensure there is effective communication, collaboration and co-ordination between the new unitary councils and the existing Town and Parish councils. This should be undertaken during the development of neighbourhood decision making arrangements. The new unitary councils should work with the Staffordshire Association of Local Councils to co-design parish charters and parish forums, which will firmly establish the importance of the parish sector in the new arrangements.

4

Vision/Principles For Local Government Reorganisation

Vision for Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

This proposal outlines how unitary local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will be built on the principles of accountability, innovation, partnership, and a strong sense of local identity.

Forming new unitary councils will be based on a commitment to balancing county-wide strengths with true local representation. Staffordshire’s diverse communities, ranging from lively urban centres to peaceful rural landscapes, require governance that matches their distinct character and needs.

The vision is to embrace collaboration at every level, from identifying potential innovation, to realising and championing community-led initiatives. It is important that local government reorganisation is undertaken with Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent’s residents, and that the process is undertaken with genuine engagement. It will be necessary to listen to residents’ concerns, celebrate their successes, and unleash the rich community spirit that exists in abundance throughout the county. By reshaping local government, the objective is to create a new future where local pride, opportunity, and partnership flourish, delivering enduring benefits for all.

The new unitary model should be organised on sensible geographies that enable housing markets to address local housing needs and enable place and community-based solutions for critical issues such as homelessness, social care and education. Functional economic geographics need to be reflected to drive inclusive economic growth with the huge opportunities that are available for the area.

The vision for local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in the short-, medium- and longer-term is centred around the following:

- A single tier of local government, working collaboratively across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- Enhancement of financial, social and environmental resilience of local government across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- Creation of new unitary councils that are large enough to deliver efficiently but close enough to listen and respond to local needs, i.e. realising the benefits of scale, while maintaining local connections
- Building on the principles of an innovative/creative county that is vibrant and retains the existing social and economic identity, recognising diversity, and plays to its strengths
- Balancing the population and economic strength of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent across the areas to create mutually supportive unitary councils
- Establishing a governance model for the new unitary council that improves service delivery, strengthens community bonds, and drives sustainable multi-dimensional growth
- Developing a structure of local government that unlocks devolution for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Principles for Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

The 10 local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have extensive experience of delivering the scale of change required to implement local government reorganisation. Working with sector support organisations and taking advantage of the knowledge gained from other areas that have already progressed LGR have informed a set of guiding principles to develop the target operating model for the new unitary councils, which will in turn support effective implementation:

The design principles are:

- **Customer focussed** - Services will be designed from the perspective of residents and businesses rather than organisational structures, and implementation should embrace the opportunity to simplify processes and communication, so that customers are directed to the right support at the right time
- **Local accountability and decision making** - Services will be developed to reflect local needs whilst achieving efficiencies at scale. Local decision-making will be transparent, visible, and accessible to residents
- **Insight led** - Robust data, analytics and citizen feedback will be used to inform priorities, understand demands, monitor impact and improve outcomes
- **Sustainability** - Financial sustainability will be the foundation of the new structures. There will be a focus on longer-term planning with investment in prevention and early intervention, optimising the use of assets, and minimising the environmental impact of service delivery.
- **Digital first - inclusive by design** - The new unitary councils will embrace the use of digital and AI technology to design services that are intuitive, integrated and accessible and ensure that there is appropriate support for digitally excluded or disadvantaged groups
- **Outcome focussed** - There will be a clear emphasis on outcomes. The new unitary councils will continue to focus on the economic growth that benefits both current and future generations. Outcomes will be linked to the Government's missions and the Local Government Outcomes Framework.
- **Empowerment** - A one team approach across the new unitary councils will be fostered. This will create a delivery-focused culture that encourages learning, innovation, trust and respect across the new organisations. Citizens, elected members, and the workforce will be engaged and empowered to shape the development of the new Councils and their services.
- **Collaboration** - The new unitary councils will work hand in hand with local partners, from schools and voluntary groups to major employers and health providers, to exploit the opportunities for public sector reform to foster stronger, safer communities and a thriving, inclusive economy

5 Options Appraisal

Appraisal of the Options – Supporting Evidence

The feedback received from MHCLG on the interim plans submitted by the Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent reiterates the need for any final proposal made to Government to be based a wide range of supporting evidence.

The feedback also stressed the requirement for effective data sharing between the local authorities. It is also recommended in the feedback that final proposal(s) should use the same assumptions and data sets or be clear where and why there is a difference. There will be the need for the development of a robust evidence base to be shared by the Councils to underpin final proposals.

The principle of establishing a shared evidence base was agreed by the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Councils at an early stage in the process. The development of all of the proposals submitted by the local authorities has been data-led, grounded through research, constructive dialogue, and strong local engagement. Where possible, all the Councils have worked together effectively to ensure that data and information are shared, and the evidence base is accurate, robust and consistent between the proposals.

The principal supporting evidence to support the options appraisal was based on the following datasets:

Demographics

- Population, Area and Population Density (Source: ONS Census 2021)
- Rural Urban Classification of each local authority (Source: ONS)
- Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (Source: MHCLG)
- Productivity - Gross Value Added (GVA) (Source: Midlands Engine)

Democratic Representation

- Electoral Division, Wards and Councillors (Source: The Local Authority Boundary Commission for England)

Tax Base and Council Tax Levels

- Property Types (ONS Census 2021)
- Dwellings – Council Tax Bands (Source: LG Inform)
- Council Tax Base and Levels (Source: Individual Council Tax Setting Reports)
- Business Rates Rateable Values and Income (Source: MHCLG and Valuation Office Agency)

Financial Information

- Reserves (Source: Individual Authorities' Statement of Accounts 2023/24 and 2024/25)
- Borrowing and Investments (Source: Individual Authorities' Statement of Accounts 2023/24 and 2024/25)
- Revenue Budgets 2025/26 (Source: MHCLG RA Data)

Approach to Evaluation of the Options

The options appraisal has been considered in a three-stage process:

- **Stage One** – a high-level options assessment which identified a small number of shortlisted options for reorganisation of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- **Stage Two** – an outline options appraisal that set the foundational vision and identified a preferred option
- **Stage Three** – a full options appraisal, including a detailed financial appraisal, and selection of the final option for the development of a proposal

Stage One – High Level Options Assessment

A significant amount of analysis is required to consider any option in detail and to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Given the timescales for submission, it was unfeasible to consider numerous options in detail, particularly where a high-level assessment of an option is clearly going to indicate its unsuitability.

There are a number of important considerations that are critical to any high-level analysis and narrowing down to a smaller number of options that can be assessed in some detail.

In evaluating the optimal structure for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent LGR, there was a high-level assessment of all viable configurations against MHCLG's published criteria, along with feedback provided relating to the Interim Plan submissions. This involved exploring 16 different variations that can be summarised as five broad options:

- **Single Unitary Council for all of Staffordshire, including Stoke-on-Trent**

- **County Unitary Council co-existing with the existing Stoke-on-Trent City Unitary Council**
- **Four Unitary Councils**
- **Three Unitary Councils**
- **Two Unitary Councils**

The high-level options assessment reached the following conclusions:

Single Unitary Council authority for all of Staffordshire, including Stoke-on-Trent

While this option was not formally proposed by any Council at the interim submission stage, it was considered as part of the initial longlist. It would involve creating one Council covering the entire Staffordshire geography, including Stoke-on-Trent. This proposal was discounted for the following reasons:

- **Devolution misalignment:** The government criteria mean that a single unitary council and Mayoral Strategic Authority cannot be established on the same geographical footprint
- **Excessive scale:** The population of a single Unitary Council for the whole of Staffordshire would reach over 1 million people, making it the second largest Council in the country and by far exceeding MHCLG's guide of around 500,000 population per Unitary Council. A county-wide unitary would be too large to design and deliver services tailored to local needs, hindering the growth potential of local economies.
- **Democratic deficit:** The Local Government Boundary Commission has indicated that they would not support the creation of authorities with a council size of over 100 members. The new Council would have a councillor to elector ratio that would disempower local ward members as it would be too large and

remote to respond to and engage with local communities effectively.

- **Loss of local identity and connections:** This model risks eroding historic and cultural identities due to the size of the new Unitary Council. It would be too large and detached to effectively respond to and engage with local communities.
- **Neighbourhood empowerment:** The government expects neighbourhood governance to be “hardwired” into new structures. A single authority of this scale may significantly limit opportunities for democratic engagement and local voice.
- **Service delivery challenges:** A single authority of this size may face significant challenges in delivering high-quality, sustainable services across such a large and diverse area e.g. range of urban, rural, and semi-rural areas. Cumbersome bureaucracy and slower decision-making processes also risk overburdening those responsible for the delivery of services.
- **Responding to challenges:** The size and scale of the organisation would mean that the new council would lack the agility to meet the diverse needs and local challenges across the County. In particular, the authority would face challenges in housing delivery due to spanning multiple housing and economic geographies which would inhibit effective housing strategy and delivery.

County Unitary Council co-existing with the existing Stoke-on-Trent City Unitary Council

As this was the preferred option of Staffordshire County Council and one of the two options set out in the joint Staffordshire Councils’ Interim Plan, this was taken forward for consideration in the outline options appraisal as Option A.

Three and Four Unitary Council Models

These options would involve creating either three or four distinct, self-governing local authorities for the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent geography.

MHCLG’s criteria for population sizes to be around 500,000 is a significant constraint. There would need to be a strong justification to propose creating unitary councils of a smaller size, which would be the case in all of three of four unitary council options.

Options for three of four unitary councils were discounted for the following reasons:

- **Small scale:** Three Unitary Councils would not achieve the guide of 500,000 population
- **Fragmented services:** It would complicate local governance by splitting key people services across multiple organisations. For example, the two existing Adult Social Care services would become three or four.
- **Increased costs:** Each Unitary Council authority will require its own leadership and management structure, reducing the opportunity for financial efficiencies
- **Weakens economies of scale:** Essential for efficient public administration, economies of scale would be reduced
- **Limited financial resilience:** Smaller authorities would be less resilient with funding pressures and exposure to large-scale investments
- **Undermines reorganisation benefits:** Whilst reorganising local government in Staffordshire, it would counteract some of the goals of reorganisation, particularly regarding creating resilient and sustainable organisations to be the building blocks for future devolution

Two Unitary Council Models

Given the population of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent (1.1m), in order to meet the criteria and create new councils of similar size, it follows that shortlisted options should not be for more than two unitary councils.

One of the key foundations for creating new unitary councils for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is the economic geography. The evidence outlined in both the Stoke-on-Trent and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Councils interim plans clearly demonstrates that there are two separate economies operating in Staffordshire i.e. Northern Staffordshire and Southern Staffordshire.

- Economic data shows that North Staffordshire is a cohesive economic geography which has formed around the economic needs and activities created within Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, the market towns of the Staffordshire Moorlands and other smaller settlements. The geography is also aligned with housing market areas.
- The local authority areas in the South of the County have strong links with the West Midlands conurbation, including high levels of in/out commuting, and high levels of visitor flows for retail and leisure opportunities. Four of the six councils co-founded the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP), and some are non-constituent members of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

Staffordshire has significant areas of rurality, and the geography of the any options for consideration should be practical to support efficient service delivery which rely on effective transport networks. Where possible, the options should complement the structure of partners, including healthcare, which is principally provided on a North/South basis.

The factors set out above direct the sensible split of the area to be on a North/South basis. i.e. East/

West unitary options or more complex configurations should be discounted as none of the local authorities were supporting this as a preferred option. This was the conclusion reached by the Staffordshire Leaders board, hence the inclusion of the two unitary councils on a North/South geography in the joint Interim Plan submitted to MHCLG in March 2025. The following two unitary option was taken forward for consideration in the outline options appraisal as **Option B.**

- **North** (including Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke-on-Trent)
- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire** (including Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth)

This option results in an uneven split of population between the two new unitary councils (c. North 478,000, Southern and Mid Staffordshire 657,000). For this principal reason, it was agreed to consider an option to extend the boundary of the North Staffordshire unitary to include East Staffordshire and the following option was taken forward for consideration in the outline options appraisal as **Option C.**

- **North** (including East Staffordshire, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke-on-Trent)
- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire** (including Cannock Chase, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford and Tamworth)

Where North Staffordshire ends and South Staffordshire begins is a matter of interpretation. Certainly, there are parts of the Stafford Borough, including areas on the border of Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands (parts of Blythe Bridge, Meir Heath) that would at least see themselves as part of the Northern area of Staffordshire. There are also parts of East Staffordshire (Uttoxeter and its surrounding rural hinterland) that has strong economic links to North Staffordshire. This consideration was flagged up in the outline options

that were published at the Interim Plan stage by the other councils:

- Stoke-on-Trent City Council makes the outline case for the creation of a unitary council for North Staffordshire, **covering as a minimum** the current borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme, the district of Staffordshire Moorlands and the city of Stoke-on-Trent
- The Southern district councils indicate that a Southern and Mid Staffordshire unitary council **will cover, as a maximum**, the current district of Lichfield, the district of Cannock Chase, the borough of Tamworth, the district of South Staffordshire, the borough of Stafford and the borough of East Staffordshire

The MHCLG guidance confirmed that existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for proposals, but where there is a strong justification, more complex boundary changes will be considered.

Based on the above, it was agreed to include an option in the outline appraisal to include parts of Stafford Borough and East Staffordshire Borough in the North unitary with a population of c.59,000. The following two unitary option was taken forward for consideration in the outline options appraisal as **Option D**.

- **North** (including East Staffordshire (Part) Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stafford (Part) Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke-on-Trent)
- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire** (including Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire (Part), Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford (Part) and Tamworth)

In summary, following the consideration of the analysis above, and the established preferences of the other Staffordshire Councils, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council shortlisted the following four options, as set out in **Figure 9**, for consideration in the outline options appraisal.



Option A

Staffordshire
Cannock Chase
East Staffordshire
Lichfield
Newcastle-under-Lyme
South Staffordshire
Stafford
Staffordshire Moorlands
Tamworth

Stoke-on-Trent (unchanged)

Population
Staffordshire
875,900

Stoke-on-Trent
258,400



Option B

North Staffordshire
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stoke-on-Trent

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
Cannock Chase
East Staffordshire
Lichfield
South Staffordshire
Stafford
Tamworth

Population
North Staffordshire
477,500

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
656,800



Option C

North Staffordshire

East Staffordshire
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stoke-on-Trent

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Cannock Chase
Lichfield
South Staffordshire
Stafford
Tamworth

Population

North Staffordshire
601,500
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
532,800



Option D

North Staffordshire

East Staffordshire (Part)
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Stafford (Part)
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stoke-on-Trent

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

East Staffordshire (Part)
Cannock Chase
Lichfield

South Staffordshire

Stafford (Part)
Tamworth

Population

North Staffordshire
536,172
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
598,128

Figure 9: Staffordshire Moorlands Shortlisted LGR Options for Detailed Consideration in the Outline Options Appraisal

Stage Two – Outline Options Appraisal

The shortlisting of four options allowed a more detailed appraisal to be undertaken. The outline options appraisal considers the following in line with the criteria set by the Secretary of State:

1. The alignment of place-based priorities held by the Councils named within each LGR option
2. Whether the proposed option(s) represent a sensible economic area, by testing:
 - The extent to which proposed unitary boundaries/geographies are reflective of the behaviours and needs of Staffordshire Moorlands' residents (employment, travel, retail, leisure, public services etc.)
 - The extent to which each LGR option is reflective of the behaviours and needs of Staffordshire Moorlands' local businesses (skills, infrastructure, innovation, sector specialisms and supply chains etc.)
 - The economic strength of the proposed new Unitary Council, testing metrics including Gross Value Added (GVA), gross median weekly pay and proportion of people in skilled employment etc.)
3. Whether the proposed option(s) represent a sensible geographical area, by testing:
 - The ability of the option to (either) demonstrates a population of more than 500,000 residents or provide a compelling narrative that would justify an exemption to this rule
 - Extent to which options allow for maintaining or developing existing Town/Parish Council governance arrangements, to allow for local representation/decision making
 - The extent to which an LGR option aligns with the current boundaries of the Police and Crime

Commissioner, Integrated Care Board/System, Fire and Rescue, Community Safety Partnership and GP clusters etc.

- The perceived alignment or variance across the proposed population, in relation to inequality and deprivation (health, skills, employment, income, crime, housing, barriers to services and healthy life expectancy)
 - The scale and achievability of housing targets held by each Council within an LGR option
4. Whether the proposed options are the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
 - The collective revenue base (including council tax base, business rates income) and comparing the per capita tax base with other options for the two-tier area
 - Using the CIPFA financial resilience index, the following metrics would be applied to each LGR option to assess the financial sustainability of each option:
 - Reserve sustainability measure
 - Level of reserves
 - Gross external debt
 - Fees and charges to service ratio

The Council commissioned external advisers, Mutual Ventures, to undertake an assessment of the Council's four shortlisted options against the criteria for unitary local government as set out by the Minister in the invitation letter.

The assessment was informed by a comprehensive place-based data set, making use of publicly available data and information provided by the Council. The shortlisted options were assessed against each of the following criteria:

- The proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government
- Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks
- Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens
- New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements
- New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunities for neighbourhood empowerment

The further criterion that was identified by the Minister was not considered as part of this assessment as it relates to the outputs from the consultation and engagement activity that are to be used to support the submission of the final proposal:

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

This assessment made by Mutual Ventures was considered as part of a more detailed outline option appraisal to establish Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's preferred option.

The appraisal of the shortlisted options clearly demonstrated that Option A should not be pursued by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council as its preferred option for local government reorganisation.

The primary rationale for this recommendation is that it does not meet the criteria for unitary local government set out in the invitation to submit proposals. There are a number of key underlying reasons why it does not meet the criteria:

- The analysis clearly shows that the socio-economic geography of Staffordshire operates on a North/South basis, and it would be beneficial of new unitary councils that reflect this
- A whole of Staffordshire Unitary would be too large and remote from communities
- There would be complexities in organising effective service delivery across such a large geographic area
- It would leave Stoke-on-Trent as small unitary which with a population of 258,400, is considerably below the benchmark of 500,000 and it would be extremely challenging to make a robust case for this
- There would be an inequality in the split of the two unitary councils i.e. it does not facilitate dealing with the service demand challenges or improve the financial sustainability of Stoke-on-Trent so would not improve local government in the area as a whole
- There could be a significant democratic deficit – there is the potential that the Staffordshire Moorlands area would potentially have only seven councillor representatives on the new unitary council, reducing from the existing 63 (56 district and seven county)
- Although the financial savings would be potentially higher than Options B, C and D, the levels of disruption and complexities of amalgamation of the service delivery arrangements of the eight district and borough councils could result in significant area-based arrangements which would erode the financial benefits

The appraisal concluded that Options B, C and D are all credible options for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. All three options broadly meet the criteria for unitary local government set out in the invitation.

There are, however, a number of issues that should be considered before considering Option B as a preferred option:

- In the North unitary council, the population of the City of Stoke-on-Trent (258,400) would be larger than the rest of the area (219,100) – there would a risk of the specific issues relating to the market towns and rural villages and hamlets not having a sufficient focus
- There would be an imbalance in the council tax and business rates bases of the North Unitary and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils, which would potentially be a challenge for ongoing financial sustainability in the North
- There would be a democratic deficit in the North Unitary prior to any LGBCE Boundary Review that would follow the establishment of the unitary council

The principal issue with Option C is the economic geography. Most East Staffordshire communities look South or East. There are parts of East Staffordshire that are clearly a part of the North Staffordshire economic area, but these are small parts in the North of the borough.

Based on the analysis, it was concluded that Option D provides the best option for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council. The key reasons are as follows:

- The additional population from parts of the Stafford and East Staffordshire Boroughs provide a more even split of the population between the North Unitary (536,170) and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary (598,130)
- It removes the City of Stoke-on-Trent dominance in the North Unitary
- The additional council tax and business rates base from the Stafford and East Staffordshire Boroughs will improve the revenue generation potential of the North Unitary when compared to Option B
- The expanded boundary into East Staffordshire and Stafford contains parts of the A50 growth corridor which would allow a focus for the North unitary to underpin housing and employment growth
- It is anticipated that it will be relatively easy to justify communities such as Stone, Uttoxeter, Meir Heath, Blythe Bridge, Barlaston, Swynnerton as part of the North Staffordshire socio-economic geography

Based on the outline options appraisal, Option D was confirmed as Staffordshire Moorlands District Council’s preferred option for Local Government Reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in July 2025.

Stage Three – Full Options Appraisal

Post the submission of the Interim Plans, there have been the following revisions to the preferred options of a number of the other local authorities in Staffordshire:

- The election of a new Administration for Staffordshire County Council, which has revised the County Council's previous position for a single unitary model to a new preferred option of a two-unitary council model on a West-East footprint covering the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- The confirmation of the preferred option of Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council for a four unitary model
- The revision of the preferred option of Lichfield District Council, Tamworth Borough Council and South Staffordshire District Council to a three unitary council model

Consequently, the outline options appraisal has been updated to reflect the following:

- The assessment against the criteria for unitary local government has been refreshed to include Staffordshire County Council's new preferred option for two unitary councils on an East/West geography (the three unitary option being pursued by Lichfield, South Staffordshire and Tamworth and the preferred option of Newcastle-under-Lyme for four unitary councils have not been considered in the full options appraisal for the reasons set out in the high level assessment options set out above)



- The outline options appraisal has been updated to include a more thorough financial analysis which includes a forecast of the efficiency savings that will accrue, the transition costs and the payback period for each of the options

Staffordshire County Council’s preferred option for two unitary councils on an East/West geography has been included in the full options appraisal as **Option E** as set out in *Figure 10*.



Figure 10: Option E; Two Unitary Councils East and West Staffordshire

A red/amber/green (RAG) status has been applied to the performance of the new unitary council options for selected indicators. This is designed to demonstrate:

- **GREEN:** The new unitary council that includes Staffordshire Moorlands District Council demonstrates improved performance against a specific measure, when compared to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council’s current performance
- **AMBER:** The new unitary council that includes Staffordshire Moorlands District Council demonstrates a similar level of performance against a specific measure, when compared to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council’s current performance
- **RED:** The new unitary council that includes Staffordshire Moorlands District Council demonstrates a worse performance against a specific measure, when compared to Staffordshire Moorlands District Council’s current performance

The full assessment of the shortlisted options against the criteria is attached at **Appendix B**. Section 10 of the assessment provides a summary of the conclusions and provides a judgement to the extent that each of the five options meets each of the criteria and sub-criteria. This assessment is summarised in *Figure 11*. It sets out the extent to which each option meets the required criteria as follows:

Met – with evidence of strategic alignment										
Partially met but requires focus to mitigate risks										
Not met - or shows limited alignment										
Criteria	Option A		Option B		Option C		Option D		Option E	
Establishment of a single tier of local government – sensible geographic and economic areas										
Establish a single tier of local government										
Meets 500,000 population	1	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	5	6
Democratic representation										
Local identity, culture etc.										
Increase housing supply										
Sensible economic area										
Appropriate tax base and not creating disadvantages areas										
Achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks										
Right size to withstand financial shocks	1	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	5	6
Exceptional Financial Support - firmer footing	1	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	5	6
Right size to achieve efficiencies	1	2	3	4	3	4	3	4	5	6
High quality and sustainable public services										
Improved service delivery and avoidance of fragmentation			3	4	3	4	3	4	5	6
Deliver public service reform and Value for Money (VfM)			3	4	3	4	3	4	5	6
Support devolution arrangements										
Community engagement and neighbour empowerment										

- Key**
- Option A**
 1 = New Staffordshire unitary council
 2 = Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Options B, C and D**
 3 = New North Staffordshire unitary council
 4 = New Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council
- Option E**
 5 = East Staffordshire unitary council
 6 = West Staffordshire unitary council

Figure 11: Summary of the assessment of the Council's shortlisted options against the criteria for unitary local government

Financial Appraisal of Options

After taking account of the assessment of the options against the criteria for local government reorganisation, a detailed financial appraisal of the shortlisted Options B, D and E has been undertaken.

The purpose of the Financial Appraisal was to:

- Understand the financial sustainability of the options for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- Ensure that local government in the whole of Staffordshire in a future configuration is financially viable
- Deliver long-term and measurable financial benefits, value for money and efficiency with a balance to ensure success in one element of the structure is not at the expense of another

The aim of the appraisal is to assess, across a reasonable period, what the net effect of the changes will be for each new unitary (for each of the shortlisted options) and Staffordshire as a whole. The **Financial Objectives** are to achieve:

1. Individual and cross-Staffordshire **financial sustainability**
2. To have a **balance to the financial strength and sustainability of the new entities**, which will give the best platform for them to serve Staffordshire as a whole
3. **Value for money** by driving change at the minimum cost necessary and deriving efficiencies through greater economies of scale, removing waste and duplicate expenditure and making considered investment in people, technology, and processes

In the financial appraisal, each of the three options were assessed using the three key elements:

- Gross Annual Savings
- Implementation Costs
- Disaggregation Costs

The net effect of the Implementation and Disaggregation Costs and the Annual Benefits derive a 'Net Benefit' figure that quantifies how the changes will affect the financial position across an eight-year operation of the new arrangements following an initial 'Base Year' in 2026/27 and a 'Shadow Year' in 2027/28. Within this calculation, two additional measures have been calculated:

1. The **'Payback Period'**; the number of years it will take for the cumulative implementation costs to meet the cumulative benefits
2. The **'Balance of Benefits'**; gives a ratio showing how the assessed options are balanced between the two new unitarities. The nearer to 50:50 (a differential of 0) the better as this provides an equilibrium that minimises the risk of one new unitary being financially weaker than its partner and undermining the financial sustainability for Staffordshire as a whole.

The results of the financial assessment of the three shortlisted options are shown in **Table 4**.

Option		Implementation and Disaggregation Costs	Payback Period	Net Benefit Over 10 Years	Balance of benefits between Unitary 1 and 2
		£m	Year	£m	% (differential)
Option B		214	3.8	318	48.8:51.2 (2.4)
Option D		215	3.9	306	50.8:49.2 (1.6)
Option E		211	4.3	278	67.2:32.8 (34.4)

Table 4: Financial Assessment of the Shortlisted Options for Local Government Reorganisation

The financial analysis shows that Option B provides a reasonable and sound base financial position. There is a payback across the whole of Staffordshire in Year 3.8 with annualised net benefits from this point onwards. The North Staffordshire Unitary has a payback year of 3.2, and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary taking longer to achieve payback in year 4.3. Option E has a payback year of 4.3 overall and shows net benefits from then onwards. The Eastern Unitary pays back in 3.3 years and the Western Unitary 5.2 years. This divergence continues thereafter with a much stronger East Unitary accelerating beyond its Western neighbour throughout the assessment period, giving rise to a significant financial imbalance.

Building on the positives of a base position suggested by Option B, Option D has a similar overall payback year of 3.9 years; 3.3 years for the North Staffordshire Unitary and 4.3 years for the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary. Enhancing the Northern area gives much greater balance to the financial position of Option D, with 50.8% of the Net Benefits in the Northern Authority and 49.2% in the South. This provides for a better balance than Option B (48.7% in the North and 51.3% in the South), setting a position of a more financially sustainable solution for Staffordshire as a whole. This was identified as the preferred option for the development of a full proposal for submission in response to the invitation from the Secretary of State.



6

Base Proposal

Base Proposal Configuration

Following the appraisal of options, the Base Proposal in this submission is based on the whole district and borough boundaries, prepared in accordance with Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 and the February 2025 invitation. It is a statutory base proposal and is not the final proposal being made. The substantive proposal, which requests ministerial boundary modification, is set out in **Section 7**.

The Base Proposal groups existing principal authorities into two unitary councils, without any changes to existing district and borough council boundaries:

- **North Staffordshire Unitary Council** - including Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council **Type B proposal**
- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Council** - including Cannock Chase District Council, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire District Council, Stafford Borough Council and Tamworth Borough Council **Type B proposal**

Assessment of the Base Proposal Against the Criteria for Unitary Local Government

The analysis undertaken in the Options Appraisal in Section 7 demonstrates that the Base Proposal broadly meets the criteria for unitary local government. **Figure 12** details a high-level summary of its compliance.

Criteria	Assessment
1 - Single tier of local government	- Sensible economic area which align with the economic geography of Staffordshire, will provide opportunities for growth, and is reflective of local identity and culture - New unitary councils would have adequate levels of taxbase to provide the foundations for financial sustainability - Supporting evidence highlights opportunities for improvements in service delivery and outcomes
2 - Efficiency and capacity	- Right scale – new unitary councils will meet the required population size when implemented - Will provide significant financial benefits through aggregation of existing local authorities and consolidation of the existing two tier services
3 - Quality and public services	- Creates a new structure that will provide significant opportunities for improvements in services to residents - Structure will create the platform for significant opportunities for wider public service reform
4 - Understand and meet local needs	- Supported by four of the ten local authorities in Staffordshire - Aligns with existing partners delivery structures - Design of new unitary councils could reflect the priorities of stakeholders and residents
5 - Support devolution	Creates two unitary councils that will provide the foundations for the development of a Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
6 - Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	- New unitary councils will have sufficient capacity to make provisions for arrangements for appropriate neighbourhood empowerment through Neighbourhood Areas Committees - Appropriate democratic representation can be developed through the use of existing ward and boundary structures

Figure 12: Base Proposal High Level Summary Compliance with Criteria for Unitary Local Government

The compliance of the Base Proposal is further evidenced in the analysis of the Modified Proposal set out in **Section 7**.

7

Formal Request for Modification of the Boundaries and the Modified Proposal

The guidance provided by the Secretary of State also sets out the position regarding boundary changes. It states that existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for proposals, but where there is a strong justification, more complex boundary changes will be considered through a modification request.

It should be noted that there will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability-related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

This proposal contains a modification request in that it provides for boundary changes in existing district areas.

The modification requested is to include areas that are currently within the Stafford Borough Council and East Staffordshire Council boundaries in the proposed North Staffordshire Unitary Council boundaries.

Outline Justification for the Inclusion of Parts of the Stafford and East Staffordshire Boroughs in the North Staffordshire Unitary Council

Figure 13 sets out the opportunity to improve the Base Proposal with a boundary modification:

Criteria	Opportunities to Strengthen Compliance with Modification
1 - Single tier of local government	• Could build on the sensible economic area provided for in the Base Proposal and balance the opportunities for growth between the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils • Potential to improve the connections with local identity and culture • Opportunity to provide more even split of the levels of taxbase of the two proposed unitary councils • Potential to correct the anomalies of existing local authority boundaries which would be reinforced in the North/Southern and Mid-Staffordshire split
2 – Efficiency and capacity	• Population size could be more balanced between the two unitary councils without materially impacting on the financial benefits • Financial sustainability can be improved in the North unitary without materially impacting on the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary
3 - Quality and public services	• Opportunity to refine the existing boundaries to further improve services to residents without impacting on other public services provision • Potential to enhance the opportunities for wider public service reform by aligning the boundaries around localities and communities
4 - Understand and meet local needs	• A minor modification could be acceptable to existing local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent as highlighted in their interim plan submissions • Modification could improve the operating environment for key public service providers such as police, fire and health by having more sensible geography aligned to work/life travel patterns • Modification could respond to the significant concerns of residents in the North of the county about the potential impact of the financial challenges of Stoke-on-Trent on the overall financial sustainability of the proposed North Staffordshire unitary council
5 - Support devolution	• Better balance of the two unitary councils could improve the foundations for the development of a Strategic Authority for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
6 - Community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	• A geography that better reflects local identity and culture would facilitate better foundations to embed neighbourhood empowerment based around localities • Democratic representation could be more balanced between the rural and urban areas of the North Staffordshire unitary council to avoid the dominance of the city of Stoke-on-Trent

Figure 13: Opportunities to Strengthen Compliance with Criteria for Unitary Local Government with Modification

There is strong justification for the modification, which is exemplified in the detailed assessment against the criteria for unitary local government set out in **Section 8**.

The justification is based on six key factors:

Population Distribution

The Base Proposal will create a significant disparity between the size of the two unitary councils. It will result in an uneven population split between the proposed unitary councils. The population distribution (based ONS 2021 data) will be:

- North Staffordshire - 477,500 **(42.1%)**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire – 656,800 **(57.9%)**

It is also important to note that the growth population in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire is marginally greater than that of North Staffordshire, which will result in the disparity between the two areas increasing over time.

The guiding principle suggesting new unitary councils of a population size of 500,000 or greater to ensure financial resilience and to be able to withstand 'financial shocks' is a particularly important consideration for the North Staffordshire unitary, which will include the existing Stoke-on-Trent City Council unitary, which is in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and has ongoing cost demand challenges.

The proposed Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council would result in it being the largest unitary council in the country. The current largest is North Yorkshire with a population of 635,270 (ONS Mid-2024 Estimate). It will be complex for the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council to maintain meaningful connections with local communities, respond to disparate local needs, and preserve distinct local identities.

The modification provides for moving c.60,000 of the population from the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary to the North Unitary. This will produce a more even population balance as follows (based ONS 2021 data):

- North Staffordshire - 536,172 **(47.3%)**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire – 598,128 **(52.7%)**

Social and Economic Alignment

The demographic profile of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is complex as there are many variances across the communities in the area. The administrative boundary of Staffordshire also covers a vast geography and a number of its districts and boroughs cover large areas containing very different towns and localities. The social and economic alignments of the existing Staffordshire districts and boroughs with each other and outside the county are therefore complex as illustrated in *Figure 14*.

Local Authority	Economic/Social Alignment	
	Within Staffordshire	Outside Staffordshire
Cannock Chase	Stafford	Birmingham
East Staffordshire	Stoke-on-Trent/Lichfield	East Midlands/Birmingham
Lichfield	Cannock Chase/Tamworth	Birmingham
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Stoke-on-Trent	Cheshire East/Shopshire
South Staffordshire	Stafford/Cannock Chase	West Midlands
Stafford	Stoke-on -Trent/Cannock Chase	West Midlands
Staffordshire Moorlands	Stoke-on-Trent	Peak District/Cheshire East
Tamworth	Lichfield	Birmingham

Figure 14: Staffordshire District and Borough Councils Economic/Social Alignment

There are a significant number of town and concentrated settlements of population in addition to large rural areas. **Figure 15** sets out the main towns and large settlements in the two unitary councils included in the Base Proposal.

North Staffordshire	Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
• Stoke-on-Trent • Leek • Cheadle • Biddulph • Newcastle under Lyme • Kidsgrove	• Burton Upon Trent • Lichfield • Burntwood • Tamworth • Stafford • Eccleshall • Cannock • Hednesford • Rugeley • Codsall • Penkridge • Stone • Uttoxeter

Figure 15: Towns and large settlements included in the Unitary Councils in the Base Proposal

Financial Sustainability of the North Staffordshire Unitary Council

In the Base Proposal, there would be an imbalance in the council tax and business rates bases of the North Unitary and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils, which would potentially be a challenge for ongoing financial sustainability in the North.

The council tax bases will provide a key foundation for the financial capacity of the new unitary authorities. When the council tax bases per head of population for each of the new unitary authorities are compared, there are significant disparities between North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire. The lower council tax base per head of population in the North Staffordshire unitary council included in the Base Proposal is driven by the comparatively low base in Stoke-on-Trent, which is a consequence of the spread of properties across the range of council bands. Stoke-on-Trent has more

than half (58.9%) of its chargeable properties in the lowest band, Band A.

The consolidated tax bases of the new unitary councils are an important consideration. **Table 5** illustrates the projected council tax bases of the new unitary councils in each of the Base and Modified Proposals compared with the population.

	Population	Proportion of Population	Council Tax Base	Proportion of Council Tax Base
		%		%
Base Proposal				
North Staffordshire	477,500	42.1	143,040	38.7
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire	656,800	57.9	226,518	61.3
	1,134,300		369,558	
Modified Proposal				
North Staffordshire	536,172	47.3	165,213	44.7
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire	598,128	52.7	204,345	55.3
	1,134,300		369,558	

Table 5: New Unitary Councils' Council Tax Base 2025/26 (Source: Individual Council Tax Setting Reports)

This analysis shows that there would be a significant disparity between the council tax bases in the Base Proposal. It also highlights that the modification has a significant impact in addressing some of this disparity.

Balance of Growth Opportunities

Housing delivery in the current Stoke on Trent, Newcastle under Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands local authority areas presents a significant challenge, further highlighted by the update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024, which amended the requirements for Local Planning Authorities to calculate their Local Housing Need (LHN) and identify a 5-year supply of housing.

The latest 5-year Housing Land Supply Statement from Stoke on Trent City Council confirms a housing requirement in the city of 4,977 units for the period 2024 to 2028, with an annual requirement of 995 units, against a total supply of 4,004 units. The Statement confirms that the city does not have 5 years' worth of housing land supply against the updated LHN figure, instead declaring 4.02 years' supply. In Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council, the Inspector's decision on 16th October 2025 in an appeal concerning an application for development at Land East of Woodside, Baldwin's Gate, confirms that the Borough's current supply of deliverable housing sites stands at just 3.08 years against an annual requirement (pre the NPPF update of December 2024) of 400 units. At Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, the Council's revised annual housing requirement is 482 units, and the current 5-year land supply is just 2.82 years.

The proposed modification requested will support the balanced delivery of housing growth in the North Staffordshire unitary, given the strength of previous housing delivery in the East Staffordshire and Stafford Borough areas, and the potential for future development. Prior to the update to the NPPF in December 2024, East Staffordshire Borough Council published a 5-year land supply of 7.37 years, which has now been revised to 5.13 years, against an annual target of 786 units. In Stafford Borough Council, the Council's annual housing requirement is now 786 and the current 5-year land supply is 3.37 years. Both towns included in the proposed modification request, Stone and Uttoxeter, have seen significant housing growth in previous years and will see further growth in future years – for

example, the Stone Neighbourhood Plan, adopted in 2021, originally allocated land for a minimum 1,000 homes over its plan period (2016-2031) which will now increase following the update to the NPPF. The proposed modification will, therefore, provide a more equitable balance of potential housing growth across the two new unitary councils on the basis outlined and taking into consideration the significant potential for housing growth in the other current local authority areas, which will form part of the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council.

There are several significant strategic growth opportunities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which provide opportunities for growth in employment and housing in the South of the county. These include:

- The A5 strategic East-West corridor linking towns and cities across the Midlands
- The A38/M42/A42 corridor - integral to connecting the East and West Midlands
- The i54 development - located near Junction 2 of the M54 motorway on the boundary of South Staffordshire and Wolverhampton
- In the North of the County, the main strategic opportunities are based around the A50/A500 corridor and the Fifty500 initiative aligned with the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone

The proposed boundary between the two new unitary authorities in the Base Proposal cuts across the A50 Growth Corridor. The Modified Proposal would see all the A50 Growth Corridor included in the North Staffordshire unitary, better balancing the strategic opportunities for the two areas and providing a better platform for the North Staffordshire unitary to realise housing growth in line with its targets.

Balance between Rural and Urban Areas of North Staffordshire and Consequences for Democratic Representation

In the North Staffordshire unitary, there will be a need to balance the urban demands of the city of Stoke-on-Trent with the demands of towns and villages and hamlets in the rest of the unitary council area. The relative proportions of population in the City of Stoke-on-Trent and the other areas of the proposed North unitary councils is set out in **Table 6**.

Local Authority	Usual resident population 2021			
	Base Proposal		Modified Proposal	
		%		%
Stoke-on-Trent	258,400	54.1	258,400	48.2
Newcastle-under-Lyme	123,300		123,300	
Staffordshire Moorlands	95,800		95,800	
East Staffordshire	-		25,730	
Stafford	-		32,940	
Other Areas	219,100	45.9	277,770	51.8
Total Population	477,500		536,170	

Table 6: Population make-up of North Unitary Council proposed in the Base and Modified Proposals (Source ONS Census 2021)

The Modified Proposal allows a better balance of population across the proposed North Staffordshire unitary council. In the Base Proposal, the population of the city of Stoke-on-Trent (258,400) would be larger than the rest of the area (219,100) – there would be a risk of the specific issues relating to the market towns and rural villages and hamlets outside the city not having a sufficient focus

This would also create a democratic deficit in the North unitary prior to any LGBCE Boundary Review that would follow the establishment of the unitary council. This specific concern was consistently raised by residents in the North of the county

during the engagement on emerging proposals for reorganisation.

The Modified Proposal addresses this imbalance in the North, by removing the city dominance of the new unitary, which would be reflected in the initial warding arrangements prior to the boundary review following implementation.

Boundary Anomalies and the Potential for Service Delivery Simplification

The boundaries of local authorities in England are considered by many to be outdated, as they often do not reflect modern patterns of life and work. The existing structure of local authorities is largely based on the 1974 reform, and as areas have developed, the boundaries no longer fully reflect how people live, work, and shop. This is apparent in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, where the core of the city of Stoke-on-Trent has expanded to its administrative boundary and beyond. This has resulted in administrative boundaries that cut across settlements, which has created anomalies where multiple local authorities are providing services, such as waste collection, to residents in a single settlement or in some cases the same street.

Local government reorganisation will ensure that a significant number of these anomalies are removed, however, in several examples, the existing anomalies will be reinforced by the proposed boundaries in the Base Proposal.

Examples of these anomalies include:

- **Blythe Bridge** – is a settlement South-East of Stoke-on-Trent with a population of approximately 6,000. The settlement is split between the current administrations of three local authorities – Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Moorlands and Stafford. The Base Proposal would see this settlement divided between the North Staffordshire and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils. The Modified Proposal would

remove this anomaly and ensure that the settlement was included in its recognised place i.e. North Staffordshire

- **Meir and Meir Heath** – is a suburb of Stoke-on-Trent situated in the South of the city. The settlement grew significantly post-war with the construction of two significant local authority housing estates, North and South of the A50. The Southern part of Meir extends uphill on the A520 (Sandon Road) into Meir Heath. The area developed further over a period of two decades from the late 1970s with the development of residential properties on the site of the former Meir Aerodrome, which closed in 1973. The Meir Park estate also extends into Meir Heath along the B5029 (Grindley Lane) and meets the A520. Meir Heath is in Stafford Borough, and the boundary with Stoke-on-Trent is along the stretch of the A520 (Sandon Road) just before it is met by the B5029 (Grindley Lane). Travelling along the A520, it is impossible to differentiate where Meir ends, and Meir Heath starts. 358 and 339 Sandon Road are in Stoke-on-Trent, whereas their neighbours at 360 and 341 are in Stafford Borough. The Modified proposal removes this anomaly with both Meir and Meir Heath being in the North Staffordshire unitary, the Base Proposal would reinforce this inappropriate boundary.
- **Trentham** – is a suburb of the city of Stoke-on-Trent, South-West of the city centre and South of the neighbouring town of Newcastle-under-Lyme. It is separated from the main urban area by open space and by the Trent and Mersey Canal and the River Trent, giving it the feel of a village. The River Trent is the border between the City of Stoke-on-Trent and Stafford Borough for most of its Southerly flow past Trentham. Some parts of Trentham are in Stafford Borough, notably the parish church and the remaining buildings of the Trentham Hall estate. The ducal estate of the Sutherland family is now an award-winning visitor attraction branded as Trentham Gardens, and the estate is now one of Stoke-on-Trent's major

leisure and tourist attractions. Most residential properties in Trentham are within the city of Stoke-on-Trent. The whole of Trentham Gardens is in Stafford Borough, in addition to a small proportion of the residential properties in the settlement. The Base Proposal would reinforce this boundary, whereas the modification would more sensibly place the whole of Trentham in North Staffordshire.

- **Wedgwood** – in 1940, the renowned ceramics manufacturer Wedgwood developed its new factory on the Barlaston estate. The move from its existing base in Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent took place in 1950, due to the intervention of the Second World War. Alongside the factory, a small residential development was undertaken by the Wedgwood Company as a housing estate for its workers. In 1974, both the factory and the estate were in Stafford Borough. Local government reorganisation in the mid-1990s, through a boundary change, saw the factory move into the city of Stoke-on-Trent, whereas the residential settlement remained in Stafford Borough. Between 2014 and 2016, there was further housing development comprising approximately 200 dwellings. Wedgwood Park was part of a larger regeneration plan for the site, which included a new factory, offices, and the World of Wedgwood visitor centre. The whole of this housing development sits within the city of Stoke-on-Trent boundary. These



developments have established Wedgwood as a recognised settlement, separate from its neighbouring village, Barlaston. The Base Proposal would see this settlement being divided between the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils. The modified proposal would remove this anomaly. It would patently be a nonsense for anything associated directly with the Wedgwood operations, so intrinsically linked with the North of the county, to be located within a Southern and mid-Staffordshire authority area.

- The Principal Area Boundary Review (PABR) process could be used for the external boundary between the two principal local authorities to be reviewed, and an option would be to request a PABR following reorganisation. However, the invitation from the Secretary of State sets out that consideration will be given to boundary changes proposed in LGR submissions taking place alongside structural change where there is strong justification. This presents a significant opportunity to resolve some of these issues and avoid the impact of making changes to the responsibilities for service provision to residents twice in quick succession.

Determining the Precise Boundary between the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils

The outline justification for the modification set out above informs the preferred boundary between the two new unitary councils.

A crucial element in any local reorganisation submission is the consideration of effective arrangements for democratic representation in the newly created Councils, and this needs to be considered before determining the extent of their future boundaries. The Electoral Commission has also published guidance on planning for devolution and local government reorganisation, which confirms

that it is expected that appropriate warding arrangements will be set out in the structural changes order for the new authority. The LGBCE has confirmed that it will not be able to carry out an electoral review on any authority before it has vested. As such, any electoral arrangements in proposals that are made in November will be required to be based on existing ward boundaries (at parish, district or county level) as such boundaries have been the subject of a review by the LGBCE previously.

It is respected that the expectation of MHCLG at this stage is that proposals will set out indicative councillor numbers and that warding arrangements will be a consideration for the emerging new unitary councils and discussion in developing the Structural Changes Order. With this in mind, potential warding arrangements for the two new unitary councils have been developed to inform the basis of the precise split of the boundary between the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Councils. This will ensure that the modification request, if accepted, will not frustrate the Structural Changes Order development process.

It has been confirmed that interim electoral arrangements will be needed for the ward boundaries for the initial 'shadow' elections, in the absence of a full review. A full electoral review will only be carried out by the LGBCE after the new unitary councils are established i.e. before their next elections after vesting.

The interim arrangements will need to be based on existing wards, divisions and parish boundaries. Ultimately, it will be a decision for the Government on whether external boundaries can be justified, and the Government may ask for advice from the LGBCE in some areas.

Regarding the justification for varying the external boundaries as proposed in this modification request, the guidance from the LGBCE is that the following should be considered:

Community identity and interests

- What defines a community as distinct, and how facilities stimulate and provide a focus for community interaction
- History and tradition can be important, but all communities evolve. What are the nature and extent of communities today and how will they evolve?

Effective and convenient government

- Think about service patterns – does a boundary divide neighbours on the same street, resulting in different waste collections, street repairs, etc.?
- Boundaries can become defaced over time, due to housing/commercial developments

The LGBCE has also indicated in further guidance that they would expect no Council proposals to contain fewer than 30, nor more than 99, councillors. It has also been confirmed that any proposal that is made needs to:

- Provide electoral arrangements for English principal local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters
- Keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with principal local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens

The considerations for any proposal for new electoral arrangements are complex as the existing arrangements in Staffordshire span two-tiers of local government (a county council with eight district and borough councils) and an existing unitary single tier council. Given the range specified by the LGBCE for the number of councillors in the new unitary councils, the relevant boundary reviews that need to be considered are as follows:

- Staffordshire County Council – confirmed in July 2024 and took effect in the elections in May 2025 – confirmed 62 councillor representatives in 62 county electoral divisions
- Stoke-on-Trent City Council – confirmed in June 2022 and took effect in the elections in May 2023 – confirmed 44 councillor representatives in 34 wards

The current difference in the democratic representation of Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council presents a complexity when considering the warding of the new unitary Councils. The representation at the time of the boundary reviews is summarised in **Table 7**.

Authority Name	Electors	No of Wards/ County Divisions	Council Size	Electors per Councillor	Electoral Cycle
Stoke-on-Trent	177,792	34	44	4,041	Whole
Staffordshire County Council	667,255	62	62	10,762	Whole

Table 7: Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council Current Democratic Representation (Source: LGBCE)

There is a disparity between the electoral representation of Stoke-on-Trent City Council (circa 4,000 electors per councillor) and Staffordshire County Council (circa 10,700 electors per councillor). Given that the maximum number of councillors cannot be greater than 99, the representation to be proposed for any future new unitary council in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will need to be based on a combination of the existing Stoke-on-Trent City Council wards (34) and the existing Staffordshire County Council divisions (62). In order to balance the representation in a new unitary council that includes Stoke-on-Trent, multi member wards can be considered for the existing county electoral divisions. There are currently 151 wards in the eight district and borough councils in Staffordshire. Basing any proposal for future representation in new unitary councils on current district wards would be too complex.

The boundary adjustments proposed would include the following county electoral divisions of Stafford and East Staffordshire in the North Staffordshire Unitary Council:

- East Staffordshire: Uttoxeter Rural; Uttoxeter Town
- Stafford: Stone Rural North; Stone Town

There is a complexity as the Stone Rural North County Electoral Division boundary does not align with the Stone Rural Parish Council boundary. In addition, Stone Town Electoral County Division boundary does not align with the Stone Town Council boundary. As illustrated in *Figure 16*.

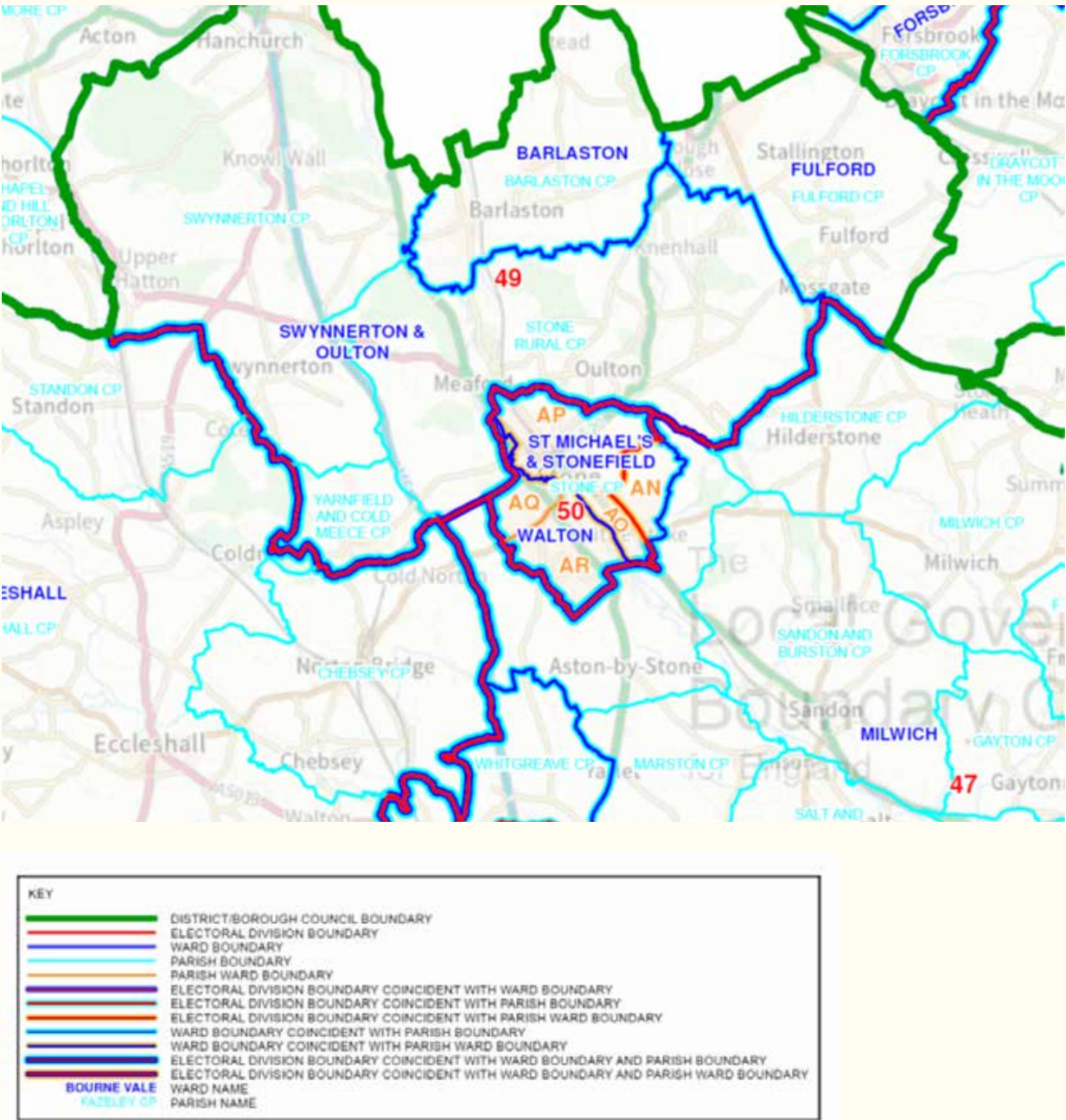


Figure 16: Staffordshire County Council – Stone Rural North (49) and Stone Urban (50) Electoral Division Boundaries (Source: Extract from LGBCE Review of Staffordshire County Council July 2024)

Given this position, it is proposed to add two parish wards which are currently in the Stafford Trent Valley County Electoral Division. This will provide a sensible geographical boundary for the new North Staffordshire Unitary Council.

The boundary of the North Staffordshire Unitary Council is therefore proposed to include the following:

From the East Staffordshire BC area:

- Uttoxeter Rural County Electoral Division
- Uttoxeter Town County Electoral Division

From the Stafford BC area:

- Stone Rural North County Electoral Division
- Stone Urban County Electoral Division
- Aston-by-Stone Ward of the Stone Rural Parish Council (currently in Stafford Trent Valley County Electoral Division)
- St Michael's East Ward of the Stone Town Council (currently in Stafford Trent Valley County Electoral Division)

The County Divisions/Parish Wards added ensure that the current Parish Council arrangements that are currently within the Stafford Borough area are preserved in the proposed North Staffordshire Unitary Council, avoiding the splitting of any parish wards from their Council, which would not be permissible in the absence of an LGBCE review. It also retains the connectivity between the two Stone Electoral Divisions and the two Uttoxeter Divisions.

The population of the parts of East Staffordshire and Stafford added to the North Staffordshire Unitary Council in the Modified Proposal are detailed in **Table 8**.

Local Authority/Parish	Population
East Staffordshire	
Blithfield	256
Draycott in the Clay	847
Marchington	2,130
Kingstone	649
Uttoxeter Town	14,400
Uttoxeter Rural	1,241
Leigh	1,031
Croxden	246
Rocester	1,679
Denstone	1,154
Ellastone	300
Ramshorn	23
Wootton	156
Mayfield	1,322
Stanton	239
Okeover	57
	25,730
Stafford	
Barlaston	2,821
Fulford	5,973
Swynnerton	3,117
Stone Town	17,282
Yarnfield and Cold Meece	2,144
Stone Rural	1,605
	32,942
Total Population	58,672

Table 8: Population of parts of East Staffordshire and Stafford added to North Staffordshire Unitary included in Proposal with Modification (Source ONS)

The geographical split of the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils is illustrated in **Figure 17**.

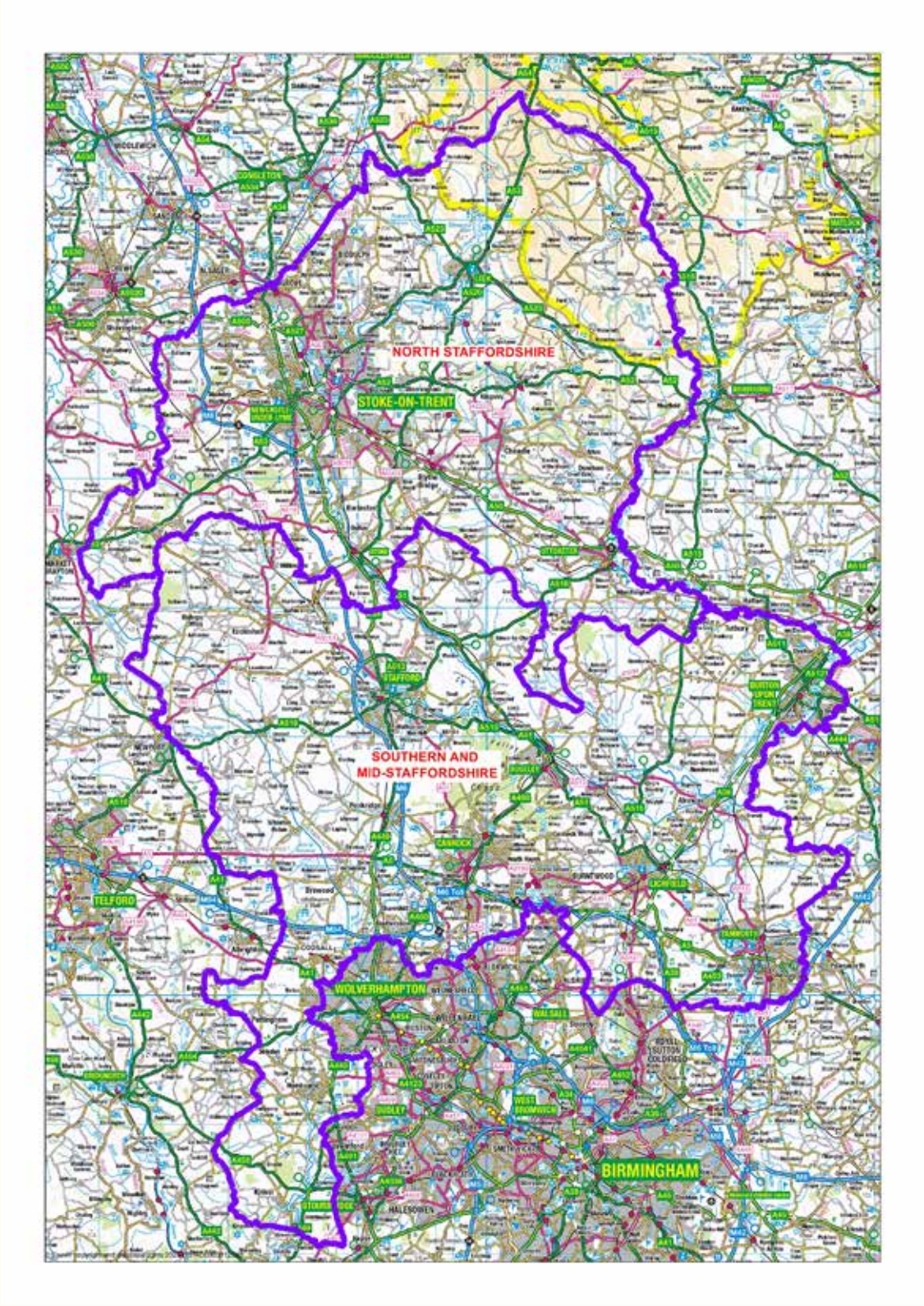


Figure 17: Illustration of the Geographical Boundaries of the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils included in Proposal with Modification

Formal Request for the Modification

The Secretary of State is requested to use his modification power in ss.7 and 11 of the 2007 Act to agree boundary changes that will create two unitary councils:

- North Staffordshire: configuration set out in *Figure 18*
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: configuration set out in *Figure 19*

North Staffordshire including the boundaries of:

City of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and in addition:

The following parishes of **East Staffordshire Borough Council**:

Blithfield	Ellastone	Mayfield
Stanton	Croxden	Kingstone
Okeover	Uttoxeter	Town
Denstone	Leigh	Ramshorn
Uttoxeter Rural		
Draycott in the Clay		
Marchington	Rocester	Wootton

The following parishes of **Stafford Borough Council**:

Barlaston	Stone Town	Swynnerton
Fulford	Stone Rural	
Yarnfield and Cold Meece		

Figure 18: Configuration of North Staffordshire Unitary Council in Proposal with Modification

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire including the boundaries of:

Cannock Chase Borough Council, Lichfield District Council, South Staffordshire District Council and Tamworth Borough Council and in addition:

The following parishes of **East Staffordshire Borough Council**:

Abbots Bromley	Burton	Outwoods
Tutbury	Anglesey	Dunstall
Rolleston on Dove	Winhill	
Anslow	Hanbury	Shobnall
Wychnor	Hoar Cross	
Barton under Needwood		
Stapenhill	Yoxall	
Branston	Horninglow and Eton	
Stretton	Brizlincote	Newborough
Tatenhill and Rangemore		

The following parishes of **Stafford Borough Council**:

Adbaston	Eccleshall	Hixon
Sandon and Burston		
Berkswich	Ellenhall	
Hopton and Coton	Seighford	Bradley
Forton	Hyde Lea	Standon
Brocton	Fradswell	Ingestre
Stowe by Chartley	Church Eaton	
Chebsey	Gayton	Marston
Tixall	Gnosall	Milwich
Weston	Colwich	Haughton
Norbury	Whitgreave	
Creswell	High Offley	
Ranton	Doxey	
Hilderstone	Salt and Enson	

And the unparished area of **Stafford Borough Council**

Figure 19: Configuration of Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Council in Proposal with Modification

8 Evaluation Against Criteria for Unitary Local Government

Criterion 1 – Establishing a single tier of local government

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

- a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
- b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
- c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.
- d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

Sensible Economic Area

Economic Geography

One of the key foundations for creating new unitary councils for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is the economic geography. There are two distinct economies operating in Staffordshire i.e. Northern Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire.

- Economic data shows that North Staffordshire is a cohesive economic geography which has formed around the economic needs and activities created within Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, the market towns of the Staffordshire Moorlands and other smaller settlements. This geography is also aligned to housing market areas.
- The economies in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire are more complex. The local authority areas in the South of the County have strong links with the West Midlands conurbation, including high levels of in/out commuting, and high levels of visitor flows for retail and leisure opportunities. Four of the six councils co-founded the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP), and some are non-constituent members of the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA). The economy in the East of the County in addition to having links with the South has strong links to the East towards the city of Derby and the county of Derbyshire.

The factors set out above direct a split of the area to be on a North/South basis. The North-South split follows natural economic patterns, allowing for stronger economic strategies within each new unitary authority.

Where North Staffordshire ends and South Staffordshire begins is a matter of interpretation. Certainly, there are parts of the district of Stafford, including areas on the border of Staffordshire Moorlands and Stoke-on-Trent (Stone, parts of Blythe Bridge, Meir Heath) and East Staffordshire (Uttoxeter) that would at least see themselves as part of the Northern area of Staffordshire.

The diverse urban/rural nature of the area has significant implications for service design across the new unitary councils. The urban areas have higher population densities and higher levels of and more concentrated deprivation, this results in a greater demand for social care services. The rural areas in Staffordshire have an aging population which necessitates different service delivery models. Rural areas also have public transport limitations and accessibility challenges. The future unitary councils must balance investment between urban regeneration and infrastructure improvements while ensuring rural communities have equitable access to employment and essential services.

The Modified Proposal allows a better balance of population across the proposed North Staffordshire unitary council.

In the North Staffordshire unitary, this will help to ensure that the issues associated with the urban areas of the city of Stoke-on-Trent and its service demand do not dominate its future wider geographical focus. The vision for the new North Staffordshire unitary will be to create a strong, thriving city of Stoke-on-Trent at its core surrounded by a constellation of seven independent but complementary market towns as illustrated in *Figure 20*.



Figure 20: North Staffordshire Unitary Council – City Surrounded by a Constellation of Market Towns

It will be a complex challenge for the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council to recognise the differing and competing focus for the significant number towns and significant settlements. Including Stone (in Stafford Borough) and Uttoxeter (in East Staffordshire) in the North Staffordshire unitary, as proposed in the modification request would recognise the economic and social alignment of residents and at the same time will reduce the competing demands in the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary.

The boundary modification will create more cohesive and culturally identifiable boundaries based on sensible economic geography that will support employment and growth in jobs, cultural identity and cohesion across the newly formed authorities

Population Distribution

The Base Proposal will result in an uneven population split between the proposed unitary councils. **Table 9** illustrates the forecast populations of the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils based on current estimates.

Local Authority	Usual resident population 2011	Usual resident population 2021	Mid 2023 Estimate	Mid 2024 Estimate	Percentage change between 2021 and 2024
Newcastle-under-Lyme	123,871	123,300	126,282	127,727	3.6
Staffordshire Moorlands	97,106	95,800	96,095	96,651	0.9
Stoke-on-Trent	249,008	258,400	265,822	270,425	4.7
North Staffordshire	469,985	477,500	488,199	494,803	3.6
Cannock Chase	97,462	100,500	103,163	104,088	3.6
East Staffordshire	113,583	124,000	127,909	129,659	4.6
Lichfield	100,654	106,400	110,192	111,932	5.2
South Staffordshire	108,131	110,500	113,412	114,423	3.6
Stafford	130,869	136,800	140,227	141,556	3.5
Tamworth	76,813	78,600	80,586	81,117	3.2
Southern and Mid Staffordshire	627,512	656,800	675,489	682,775	4.0
Total	1,097,497	1,134,300	1,163,688	1,177,578	3.8

Table 9: Forecast populations of the North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils in the Base Proposal (Source: ONS)

It is also important to note that the growth of population in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire is marginally greater than that of North Staffordshire which will result in the disparity between the two areas increasing over time.

The modification provides for moving c.60,000 of the population from the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary to the North Unitary. This will produce a more even population balance as follows (based ONS 2021 data):

- North Staffordshire - 536,172 **(47.3%)**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire - 598,128 **(52.7%)**

Live and Work Patterns and their Impact

According to Census 2021 data, almost half (49.4%) of Staffordshire's residents travelled less than 20km to work, higher than national counterparts (45.8%) but lower than the regional partners at 52.3%. Although a much smaller proportion, compared to the national average, more Staffordshire residents were likely to travel longer distances to their workplace, with 11.0% travelling 20km or further compared with 8.3% across England. This trend was also seen across all districts and boroughs, except for Newcastle-under-Lyme, where only 7.4% of residents travelled more than 20km.

Stoke-on-Trent is a major employment hub within the region, particularly for residents of Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands. There are strong 'cross-border' workforce links with the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation (about 15.4% of daily work-journeys into the Staffordshire Moorlands are from the conurbation, while 26.8% of the Moorlands resident workforce work in the conurbation).

The 2021 Census indicated c6,000-8,000 Staffordshire residents commuted to Birmingham for work, while c2,000-5,000 residents travel to Manchester.

No publicly available data have been identified to quantify the proportion of income earned by Staffordshire residents that is spent within the county. However, informed assumptions can be made based on economic and behavioural indicators:

- Capturing of local spend is likely to be highest in categories including housing, groceries, and transport, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas
- Retail leakage is likely to be high in relation to higher-end retail, entertainment, and professional services, particularly to Birmingham, Manchester, or Stoke-on-Trent
- A significant proportion of leisure spending will

likely be spent locally due to Staffordshire's strong visitor economy (e.g. Alton Towers, Cannock Chase, The Potteries)

Both new unitary councils will be well placed to align economic development, transport, planning, and tourism strategies across the entire county, increasing the ability to retain local consumer spending. Additionally, improved access to integrated data on footfall, spending and demographics across the new unitary councils will enable targeted interventions (i.e. retail incentives, events) to catalyse local spending.

Travel to work patterns clearly support the creation of two new unitary councils based on the economic geography in Staffordshire i.e. North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid- Staffordshire as proposed in both the Base and Modified Proposals.

Transport and Connectivity

Transport in Staffordshire is primarily the responsibility of Staffordshire County Council. Staffordshire County Council oversees the wide range of transport-related services including public transport planning, road maintenance and improvement projects, sustainable and active travel initiatives and transport planning and strategy (including the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan). Each district/borough council has its own Integrated Transport Strategy to address local challenges and opportunities. The statutory responsibility for transport in Stoke-on-Trent lies with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, which acts as the Local Transport Authority for the city.

The current split of this responsibility creates issues for the existing local authorities in particular in the North of county where in Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme, the strategic transport functions of Stoke-on-Trent City Council have more relevance than those of Staffordshire County Council particularly in respect of public transport planning. The alignment of strategic transport planning around the new North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary authorities will

improve the connectivity between their constituent localities.

Alongside the current development of new separate Local Transport Plans (LTP) by both Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council, the two authorities have published a [Joint Strategic Transport Statement](#) which outlines the shared intent of both of the councils to address strategic transport challenges across both areas that will unlock sustainable economic growth, improve access to jobs, contribute to decarbonisation, improve public health and enhance the quality of life for residents. This document has been produced recognising that future devolution will drive regional strategic transport priorities to maximise investment. The two new unitary councils should adopt this collaborative

approach as Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent are at the heart of the national transport network and it is imperative that multi-modal connectivity within the whole area is considered to ensure that the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent economy continues to grow and remains strong and facilitates the delivery of the Government's five missions.

Several key transformational projects are currently being delivered that will form a vital part of the county's future. These are illustrated in **Figure 21**, which is an extract from the Fifty500 prospectus, and shows the transport corridors which will sustain growth in housing and employment across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.



Figure 21: Fifty500 Midlands Growth Corridor (Source: Staffordshire County Council)

The main transport corridors are the A50/A500, A38 and A5 corridors which all have opportunities to underpin the growth of housing and employment in the area.

- The A50 and A500 roads form a critical East-West corridor linking the East and West Midlands. This corridor is vital for major manufacturers, including JCB, facilitating efficient movement of goods and services. Linked to the A50/A500 corridor the Fifty500 initiative was officially launched in February 2024, and its prospectus seeks to facilitate plans for regional supplier parks, innovation centres, and sustainable business premises, aiming to create 5,000 new jobs and add £100 million in gross value by 2030. This opportunity is aligned with the Ceramic Valley Enterprise Zone will help to create up to 9,000 new jobs and use 140 hectares of brownfield land.
- The A5 is a strategic East-West corridor linking towns and cities across the Midlands. The A5 corridor serves large cities and towns including Cannock, Tamworth, Nuneaton, Hinckley and Rugby, and supports major employment sites. Cannock Chase, South Staffordshire, Tamworth and Lichfield Councils are part of the A5 Partnership which seeks to raise awareness of the A5's expanding economic importance and collaborate on planning for its growth.
- The A38/M42/A42 corridor is integral to connecting the East and West Midlands. Home to over two million economically active residents working in 1.4 million jobs. The A38 and M42/A42 connect some of the largest cities in the region, as well as international gateways at Birmingham and East Midlands Airports, and subsequently supports housing growth, as well as improving the quality of life for those living and working in the corridor. Midlands Connect are working on a long-term approach to improving the corridor.

- The i54 development is a large, technology-focused business park located near Junction 2 of the M54 motorway on the boundary of South Staffordshire and Wolverhampton. It has attracted significant investment, includes major tenants like Jaguar Land Rover, and is undergoing further expansion with new jobs and a growing infrastructure. The site has a focus on sustainability and is designed to be a hub for business and innovation in the West Midlands.

There are clear opportunities to improve the strategic focus on transport and connectivity to underpin the desired focus on housing and employment growth through the creation of new unitary councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Due to the geographic position of the transport networks and economic corridors in the county, a two Unitary North-South model provides the best platform to focus and engage with strategic partners to maximise growth potential. The boundary modification provides for a more even distribution of these opportunities between the two unitary councils by ensuring that the A50/A500 corridor is wholly in the North Staffordshire unitary which will support the significant challenge of achieving housing growth in line with the expectations of the new targets following the Government's revision of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Local Identity, Culture and Heritage

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent share a deep and intertwined cultural identity rooted in their industrial heritage, creative traditions, and community values.

Councils across Staffordshire are already committed to joint working, ensuring better connections that bring together diverse communities and a vibrant culture sector without taking away from the unique identities of towns, villages and communities. These shared strategic ambitions and existing delivery structures could provide the basis for each unitary council to promote the local identity, culture and heritage of their respective populations, which would continue to involve collaborative working to benefit the sub-region's visitor economy, arts and creative sectors etc.

Communities across the North of the county possess a rich and distinctive local identity shaped by the area's industrial heritage, cultural traditions and a strong sense of community pride. Communities across mid and Southern Staffordshire hold a distinct identity shaped by historic towns, royal connections, religious heritage and civic pride, distinct from the industrial character of North Staffordshire. This is often expressed through independent businesses, historic markets and community-led regeneration.

Separate unitary councils in a North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire split as proposed in both the Base and Modified Proposals will be better placed to retain and build on the existing identities and cultures. The local focus would be underpinned by the existing town and parish councils in the area. This will need to be supplemented with a complementary approach to neighbourhood-based governance in the unparished areas of the new unitary councils. This is explored further in the **Evaluation of the Proposal against**

Criterion 6 which sets out a proposed framework for neighbourhood governance. The relationship with Town and Parish councils in the Staffordshire Moorlands, with its strong ties to its six unique localities, could provide a blueprint for design of future arrangements in the North Staffordshire unitary council.

The boundary modification better reflects the economic and social connections that will exist in the new unitary councils and will create more cohesive and culturally identifiable boundaries, supporting jobs, cultural identity and cohesion across the newly formed authorities.

Appropriate Tax Bases

The council tax and business rates bases will provide a key foundation for the financial capacity of the new unitary authorities.

Councils with a higher council tax base, typically with more properties in higher bands have the ability to generate greater revenue and often have lower overall service demands. Councils with lower council tax bases are often forced into making difficult choices on service provision. **Table 10** sets out details of the current council tax bases of each of the Councils in Staffordshire.

Authority Name	Population	Council Tax Base 2025/26	Growth in Council Tax Base	Council Tax Base per head of population
			%	
Cannock Chase	100,500	29,999.07	-0.05	0.298
East Staffordshire	124,000	41,575.20	1.56	0.335
Lichfield	106,400	41,522.70	0.99	0.390
Newcastle- under- Lyme	123,300	39,807.00	2.76	0.323
South Staffordshire	110,500	40,191.03	0.69	0.364
Stafford	136,800	49,634.15	0.67	0.363
Staffordshire Moorlands	95,800	34,382.00	1.91	0.359
Tamworth	78,600	23,596.00	-0.61	0.300
Stoke-on-Trent	258,400	68,850.84	-0.68	0.266
	1,134,300	369,558	0.75	0.326

Table 10: Council Tax Base 2025/26 (Source: Individual Council Tax Setting Reports)

The analysis shows the council tax base as per head of population for each of the authorities. There are significant differences in the highest, Lichfield, and the lowest Stoke-on-Trent. These differences are due to the different spread of properties across the range of council bands. Stoke-on-Trent has more than half, 58.9%, of its chargeable properties, in the lowest band, Band A. Lichfield has just 12.2% in Band A.

The criteria for unitary local government sets out that 'proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area'. The consolidated tax bases of the new unitary councils are an important consideration when considering the options. **Table 11** illustrates the projected council tax bases of the new unitary councils in the Base and Modified Proposals.

	Population	Proportion of Population	Council Tax Base	Proportion of Council Tax Base	Council Tax Base Per Head of Population
		%		%	
Base Proposal					
North Staffordshire	477,500	42.1	143,040	38.7	0.30
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire	656,800	57.9	226,518	61.3	0.34
	1,134,300		369,558		
Modified Proposal					
North Staffordshire	536,172	47.3	165,213	44.7	0.31
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire	598,128	52.7	204,345	55.3	0.34
	1,134,300		369,558		

Table 11: New Unitary Councils' Council Tax Base including Tax Base per Head of Population Based on 2025/26 (Source: Individual Council Tax Setting Reports)

The analysis set out above shows that there would be a significant disparity between the council tax bases in the Base Proposal. The Modified Proposal moves towards redressing some of this disparity and mitigates the risk of an unfair advantage emerging for the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary.

Table 12 shows the business rates and income for the local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Authority	Rateable Properties	2023 Rateable Value	Percentage Change in Rateable Value between 2017 and 2023 Valuations	Business Rates Income 2023/24 (including transitional relief)
		£'000	%	£
Cannock Chase	3,660	96,316	4.9	36,981,143
East Staffordshire	4,190	153,684	10.1	60,274,518
Lichfield	3,040	99,943	11.6	39,638,198
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3,650	100,969	11.7	36,416,494
South Staffordshire	2,850	83,122	16.6	25,625,422
Stafford	4,390	131,782	7.6	52,729,203
Staffordshire Moorlands	3,180	59,307	5.3	19,042,581
Tamworth	2,120	85,815	4.5	30,617,940
Stoke-on-Trent	9,390	242,249	3.8	75,150,021

Table 12: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Local Authorities: Business Rates Rateable Values and Income (Source: MHCLG and Valuation Office Agency)

The projected business rates base of the two new unitary councils in the Base Proposal is illustrated in **Table 13**.

	Population	Rateable Properties	2023 Rateable Value	Business Rates Income 2023/24 (including transitional relief)
			£	£
Base Proposal				
North Staffordshire	477,500	16,220	402,525	130,609,096
Southern and Mid	656,800	20,250	650,662	245,866,424
	1,134,300	36,470	1,053,187	376,475,520

Table 13: New Unitary Councils' Business Rates Bases and Potential Income Base Proposal (Source: MHCLG and Valuation Office Agency)

The analysis set out above shows that there would be a significant disparity between the business rates and income bases in the Base Proposal.

The bases and income for the Modified Proposal have not been precisely identified at this stage as the data for Stafford and East Staffordshire Boroughs will need to be properly disaggregated and split between the two new unitary councils. It should be noted however, that the part of East Staffordshire Borough that is to be included in the North unitary would include the JCB operation at Rocester which would significantly increase the share of the overall business rates base and income in the North thus move towards redressing some of the disparity in the Base Proposal.

Creating a Structure of Unitary Local Government that Supports Wider Public Services Delivery and Better Outcomes for Residents

Two unitary councils, as proposed in both the Base and Modified Proposals, will provide focused, locally tailored leadership. Each authority would have the capacity to respond more effectively to regional challenges and maintaining a balance locally between urban and rural challenges.

By creating two unitary authorities on the

proposed geography, resources can be allocated more effectively, ensuring more localised service delivery, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach that could neglect the specific needs of each area. This approach would also align with the current healthcare system, with different NHS Trusts providing services in the North and South, allowing for better coordination between the new unitary councils and the NHS. There will also be alignment with the operating models of both Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue services.

There is the potential for the Modified Proposal to have a positive impact for the relationships between the Councils and its core public service delivery partners. The stronger alignment with the economic and social connections of the residents of the two unitary councils will facilitate the delivery of a stronger multi agency locality working. This is explored in more detail in the **Evaluation of the Proposal against Criterion 3** which sets out the improvements in service delivery and wider public service reform and the **Evaluation of the Proposal against Criterion 6** which sets out a proposed framework for neighbourhood governance and integrated working.

The Modified Proposal equalises the opportunities for housing and employment growth which are reflected in the key missions of Government which are strongly reflected in the Local Government Outcomes Framework.

Criterion 2 – Efficiency, capacity and withstanding shocks

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

- a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.
- b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.
- c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
- d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
- e) 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.
- f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

Population Size of the Proposed Unitary Councils

The Proposal (including the requested modification) provides for two unitary councils with populations of reasonably equal size (based on ONS 2021 Census data):

- North Staffordshire – 536,172
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire – 598,128

The size of the proposed unitary councils complies with the guiding principle set out in the criteria for unitary local government, which states that the new unitary councils should aim for a population of more than 500,000.

Financial Objectives

The financial objectives that underpin this proposal are:

- Individual and cross-Staffordshire **financial sustainability**
- To have a **balance to the financial strength and sustainability of the new entities**, which will give the best platform for them to serve Staffordshire as a whole
- **Value for money** by driving change at the minimum cost necessary and deriving efficiencies through greater economies of scale, removing waste and duplicate expenditure and making considered investment in people, technology, and processes

Financial Appraisal

A detailed financial appraisal has been undertaken (attached at **Appendix C**), which has been developed in line with the guidance provided by MHCLG, including the feedback provided following the submission of the Interim Plans for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in March 2025. It is based on the analysis of national and local data sources and has also considered the experiences of previous local government reorganisations in other parts of England. The steps taken to undertake the financial analysis are summarised in *Figure 22*.

Step	Activity
1 Scope and methodology	• Agreement of the options to be modelled • Approach to the treatment of shared services, disaggregation and harmonisation
2 Data collection and validation	• Identification of key data sources • Gathered available information on revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets, and key service metrics. • Gathered other contextual information to understand cost pressures, risks, and transformation plans.
3 Analysis template	• Built a consolidated financial template combining district, unitary and county budgets into unified figures based on the agreed assumptions (e.g., population apportionment).
4 Estimate of savings	• Applied top-down models to estimate savings across key categories • Incorporated direct (cashable) and enabling (efficiency) savings. • Employed local inputs and benchmark data from other LGR programmes to calibrate assumptions.
5 Estimate of implementation costs	• Identified one-off costs required to deliver reorganisation • Costs were phased over an 8-year period after a 'shadow year', with timing aligned to implementation assumptions
6 Scenario modelling for each option	• Input to the template to ensure each option followed a structured financial model that calculated: • Annual and cumulative savings • Phased implementation costs • Year-on-year net benefit • Breakeven year • Total net financial benefit • Balance between entities in the option
7 Quality assurance and review	• Internal review of the models and the options assessed • External independent review of key assumptions and their application

Figure 22: Steps taken to Undertake the Financial Appraisal of the Options and Financial Appraisal

The financial model projects the savings and costs across ten years: a pre-implementation 'Base year' in 2026/27, followed by a 'Shadow year' and eight post-implementation years. This is sufficient to demonstrate a 'Payback Year' incorporating all implementation and cost savings, the latter of which will be ongoing.

Efficiency Savings

Significant financial savings will be achieved from reorganising the existing two-tier Council structure across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent into two unitary councils. This will significantly improve the financial sustainability of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

In line with the guidance, the financial appraisal provides high-level breakdowns of the projected efficiency savings. The forecast of savings considered a Base Case and Stretch Case, with the average of these reflecting a Mid Case, which has been used in the final forecasts.

No savings from LGR have been assumed to be realised in the Base Year, and only modest amounts in the Shadow Year. The savings fully commence in Year 1 of operation (2028/29) and build up from then onwards. The savings for each year have been phased based on expected realisation.

The anticipated efficiencies will be released in respect of the following:

- Reductions in leadership and senior management
- Reductions in the cost of democracy
- ICT rationalisation and systems integration
- Reductions in corporate and support service costs
- Estates and asset rationalisation
- Procurement and contract consolidation
- Service and process transformation

Council Tax Harmonisation

There are substantial funding opportunities from LGR to improve the financial sustainability of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Council tax harmonisation presents an opportunity to generate additional revenue as the levels of council tax are lifted to create parity at the earliest point across each proposed area. The importance of this additional revenue stream on future financial sustainability is significant.

Table 14 shows the different levels of Council Tax across the local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Authority Name	Council Tax 2025/26					
	District/ Borough/ Unitary	Local Precepts	County Council	Police	Fire	Total Council Tax
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Cannock Chase	251.30	29.95	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,282.30
East Staffordshire	215.73	40.70	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,257.48
Lichfield	197.85	60.31	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,259.21
Newcastle- under- Lyme	223.04	20.76	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,244.85
South Staffordshire	145.34	73.27	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,219.66
Stafford	178.75	30.98	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,210.78
Staffordshire Moorlands	185.96	53.42	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,240.43
Tamworth	208.76	0.00	1,621.71	287.57	91.77	2,209.81
Stoke-on-Trent	1,699.00	0.00	0.00	287.57	91.77	2,078.34

Table 14: Staffordshire Councils Band D Council Tax Levels 2025/26 (Source: Individual Council Tax Setting Reports)

There will be a number of options available to the newly formed unitary authorities for setting levels of council tax to replace those of the predecessor councils which have differing tax rates. This will be an important consideration to support the new organisations becoming more financially resilient.

The approach taken to balance a range of rates across a wider area will be difficult. Harmonisation at different rates will have an impact on residents. This will vary in each of the areas, dependent on the current rate of council tax in their existing local authority and the harmonisation approach taken by the new unitary council.

The financial forecasts include the impact of Council Tax Harmonisation, which is assumed to consolidate across the first three years of operation.

Other Sources of Additional Funding

There are other harmonisation opportunities from LGR that will potentially generate additional income, such as aligning fees and charges and council tax support schemes. Again, these will be a local decision for the new unitary councils. A modest increase has been included in the forecasts for additional sales, fees and charges income.

Implementation Costs

There are one-off costs required to implement the reorganisation. These costs are necessary to deliver the new entities and ensure they are configured to deliver long-term benefits. This will include one-off transition costs associated with the redistribution of county upper tier services to the new unitary, such as reconfiguring finance and HR systems, creating new organisational structures and establishing democratic and corporate capacity. As such, there is no additional recurring expenditure that is expected. The forecasts assume that the peak years for these costs are expected to be in years 1-3, with a rapid reduction from then onwards. However, the nature of some elements, such as asset rationalisation, will take several more years to achieve optimisation, so, to be prudent, related costs have been included for the entire assessment period.

The transition costs associated with creating and mobilising new unitary councils that have been incorporated into the forecasts include:

- Programme management and transition team costs
- Redundancy and pension strain
- ICT integration or separation
- Property and rebranding
- Legal and governance setup

Assessment of the Financial Benefits of the Proposal

The financial assessment of the proposal has been undertaken using the forecasts of the following

- Annual Savings
- Implementation Costs
- Disaggregation Costs

The net effect of the Implementation Costs and the Annual Benefits derive a 'Net Benefit' figure that quantifies how the changes will affect the financial position across an eight-year operation of the new arrangements following an initial 'Base Year' in 2026/27 and a 'Shadow Year' in 2027/28. Within this calculation, two additional measures have been calculated:

- The '**Payback Period**'; the number of years it will take for the cumulative implementation costs to meet the cumulative benefits
- The '**Balance of Benefits**'; gives a ratio showing how the benefits are balanced between the two new unitarities. The nearer to 50:50 (a differential of 0) the better, as this provides an equilibrium that minimises the risk of one new unitary being financially weaker than its partner and undermining the financial sustainability for Staffordshire as a whole.

The forecast financial benefits of the Base Proposal are also detailed to show the positive impact of the requested modification included in this proposal.

The forecast savings are set out in **Table 15**, and the forecast implementation costs in **Table 16**.

	Total saving over 10 Years	Equivalent annual saving
	£m	£m
Base Proposal	532	59
Modified Proposal	521	58

Table 15: Forecast Financial Savings (over a ten-year period) Delivered by the Creation of North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils

Option	Total Implementation Cost over 10 Years
	£m
Base Proposal	214
Modified Proposal	215

Table 16: Forecast Implementation Costs (over a ten-year period) Required for the Creation of North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils

A summary of the financial assessment of the Base and Modified Proposals is set out in **Table 17**.

	Implementation Costs	Payback Period	Net Benefit Over 10 Years	Balance of benefits between North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils
	£m	Year	£m	% (differential)
Base Proposal	214	3.8	318	48.8:51.2 (2.4)
Modified Proposal	215	3.9	306	50.8:49.2 (1.6)

Table 17: Financial Assessment of Base and Modified Proposals over a Ten-Year Assessment Period

The financial analysis shows that the Base Proposal produces a reasonable and sound base financial position.

The Modified Proposal has a similar overall payback year of 3.9 years; 3.3 years for the North Staffordshire Unitary and 4.3 years for the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary. Enhancing the Northern area with the modification gives much greater balance to the financial position with 50.8% of the Net Benefits in the North Staffordshire unitary and 49.2% in the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary. This provides for a better balance than the Base Proposal (48.7% in the North Staffordshire Unitary and 51.3% in the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary), establishing a position of a more financially sustainable solution for Staffordshire as a whole.

This Modified Proposal provides a positive net financial impact over ten years of £306.2 million, giving a robust position on which the two new unitary councils can plan to deliver excellent public services across the whole of Staffordshire, giving room for them to invest and grow.

Figure 23 shows how the implementation costs are primarily incurred in the earlier years and how the annual savings grow throughout the assessment period.

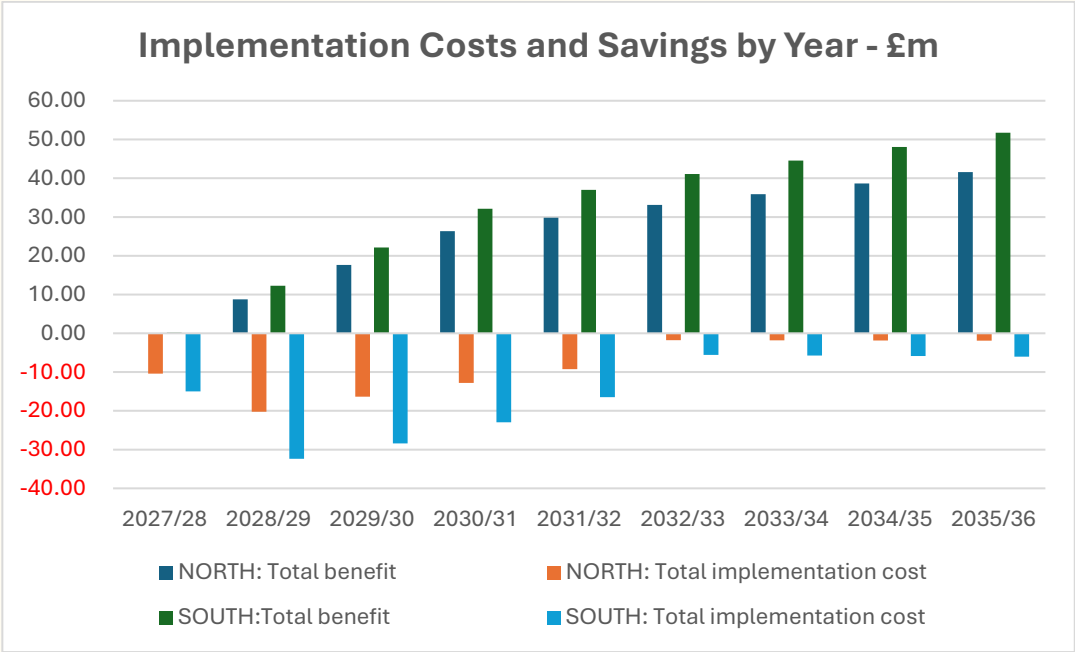


Figure 23: Modified Proposal – Implementation Costs and Financial Savings across the Evaluation Period

The financial benefits of this Modified Proposal are summarised in *Figure 24*.

Annual Savings in Year 5 (increasing thereafter)	£69.0m
Cumulative Net Benefit Across Staffordshire (10 years)	£306.2m
Payback Period – Staffordshire	3.9 years
North Staffordshire Unitary	3.3 years
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary	4.3 years
Balance of benefit between the North Staffordshire Unitary and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary	50.8:49.2

Figure 24: Summary of the Financial Benefits of the Modified Proposal

The cumulative net benefit to cost is summarised in *Figure 25*.

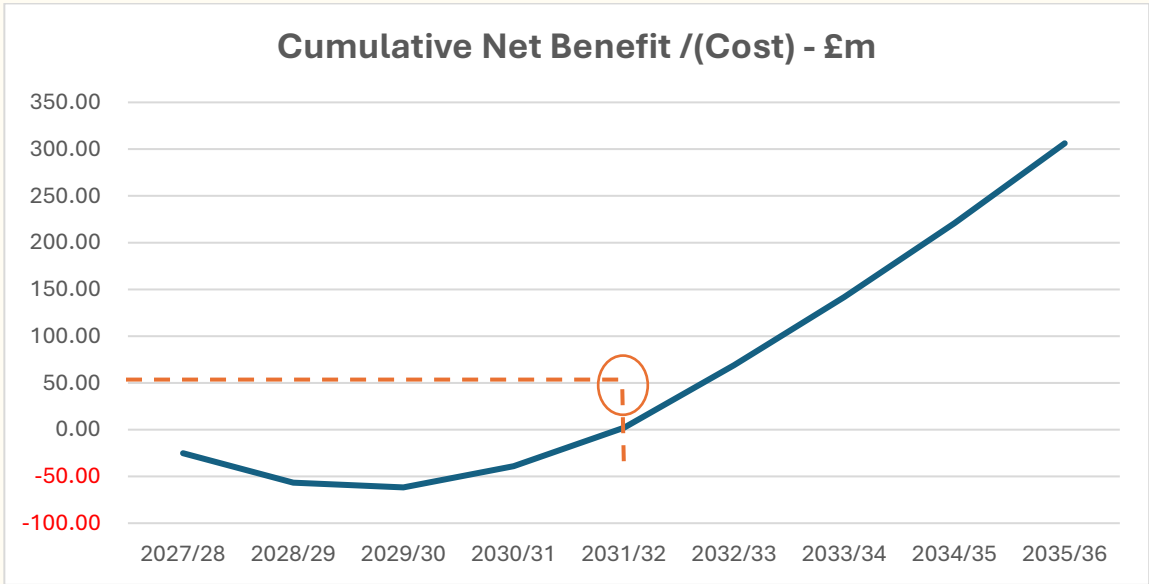


Figure 25: Modified Proposal – Cumulative Net Benefit to Cost

Ongoing Financial Sustainability of the New Unitary Councils

Any proposal will need to ensure that the new unitary structure will provide for financially sustainable local government in the whole of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent area.

A consideration for financial analysis is that it assumes that current Councils (including the County) will manage any ongoing gross budget gaps, regardless of Local Government Reorganisation. It is difficult to ascertain the precise medium term financial position of each local authority in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent on implementation day and how amalgamating them into the new unitary structure will impact on the financial outlook of the new authorities. The levels of funding, the medium-term financial outlook, unit cost analysis and importantly the levels of debt need to be carefully monitored and analysed throughout the implementation period.

The feedback on the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Interim Plans reiterates that any proposals need to recognise that Stoke-on-Trent City Council has received Exceptional Financial Support (EFS). Proposals will need to demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole, including Stoke-on-Trent, on a more sustainable footing.

The current Medium Term Financial Plans show the total gross budget gap for all Councils by 2028/29 is £40.9m (including the County Council of £24.2m). This has not been included in the financial analysis at this stage as the Medium-Term Financial Plans of all councils contain actions to eliminate these deficits hence the position will change year by year. Should there be budget gaps post vesting day, the recurring savings projected can contribute to such gaps across the new authorities.

The Government is currently consulting on the implementation of the Fair Funding 2.0 Review. Precise details on the impact of fair funding on the financial sustainability of the authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will not be clear until completion of the consultation and announcements on the Local Government Financial Settlement later in the year. However, whilst it is considered that Fair Funding 2.0 will have a significant impact on Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent councils' financial positions, the details are not yet sufficiently formed to include in the analysis. It is, however, expected that the impact for Stoke-on-Trent will remove the reliance on Exceptional Financial Support in the medium term. It is also understood that the City Council are fulfilling their obligations in relation to the existing support.

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 break even 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.

The ability of the new unitary councils to manage the debt transferred from the predecessor local authorities is an important consideration for future financial sustainability

Table 18 shows the levels of outstanding debt of the local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent on 31st March 2024 (from the latest complete set of audited accounts).

Authority	Long Term Borrowing	Short Term Borrowing	Total Borrowing
	£m	£m	£m
Cannock Chase	80.205	1.726	81.931
East Staffordshire	5.929	0.564	6.493
Lichfield	0.944	0.061	1.005
Newcastle under Lyme	0.000	0.054	0.054
South Staffordshire	15.000	0.000	15.000
Stafford	0.000	0.000	0.000
Staffordshire Moorlands	4.604	3.084	7.688
Tamworth	63.060	0.313	63.373
Stoke on Trent	602.042	121.731	723.773
Staffordshire	345.000	44.100	389.100
	1,116.784	171.633	1,288.417

Table 18: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Existing Local Authorities - Outstanding Debt on 31st March 2024

It is important to note that local authorities operate under a prudential borrowing system, i.e. there is a clear requirement to borrow to finance capital expenditure, and the consequential revenue costs (debt repayment and interest) can be met from revenue. It should be noted that all the local authorities' borrowing is significantly below their calculated limits - Capital Financing Requirements (CFR) - Cannock Chase is closest to the limit at 89%.

There should be some assurance in that the levels of debt in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, at £1.3bn is in line with those in neighbouring Derbyshire and Derby, which is £1.4bn. Recent publicity in respect of the reorganisation of Surrey and the challenges of the current levels of outstanding debt, which stands

at some £5.7bn. It is concluded that the existing levels of debt in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will be able to be managed locally.

It can be concluded from the financial analysis that this proposal for two unitary councils will secure the long-term financial sustainability of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The potential financial savings set out above, in addition to the potential positive impacts of the Fair Funding 2.0 Review, will make a step improvement in the long-term financial sustainability of the new unitary councils, including avoiding the need for reliance on EFS.

The modified boundaries included in this proposal will provide a better balance of the finances of the two new local authorities. The improved distribution of the tax bases, and the more balanced distribution of projected efficiency savings will strengthen the financial substantivity of the North Staffordshire unitary council where cost demand pressures are more profound. This will be without damaging the long-term financial position of the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council.

It should also be noted that the forecasts for financial savings in the financial assessment are prudent and realistic. It is likely that there will be potential for further savings and efficiencies from the aggregation of the large lower-tier services, such as leisure and waste collection. The net benefits will provide opportunities for the new councils to realise significant improvements in outcomes for residents.

Potential Funding Streams for One-off Investment Requirements

Considering the efficiencies that are possible through reorganisation, the Government expects that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including allowing the flexible use of capital receipts.

The transition costs will need to be met from the reserves and resources currently held by the existing councils. **Table 19** details the usable revenue reserves and capital receipts available to the Councils on 31st March 2024 (from the latest complete set of audited accounts).

Authority	General Reserves (£m)	Earmarked reserves	Usable Capital Receipts	Total Usable Reserves and Capital Receipts
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Cannock Chase	1.612	19.932	12.826	34.370
East Staffordshire	2.056	27.885	0.272	30.213
Lichfield	5.800	18.011	2.237	26.048
Newcastle under Lyme	2.157	3.051	3.629	8.837
South Staffordshire	8.331	8.251	3.584	20.166
Stafford	2.907	36.703	1.055	40.665
Staffordshire Moorlands	2.690	5.761	0.082	8.533
Tamworth	10.737	20.134	13.982	44.853
Stoke on Trent	14.790	52.557	25.144	92.491
Staffordshire	48.500	369.000	9.200	426.700
	99.580	561.285	72.011	732.876

Table 19: Staffordshire Local Authorities – Levels of Useable Revenue Reserves and Capital Receipts on 31st March 2024

The analysis shows that there was some £99.58m of usable reserves available at the end of the 2023/24 financial year. The amount available for investment in the implementation of local government reorganisation could be potentially increased by any unused Earmarked Reserves held on 31st March 2028 and use of capital receipts with Government approved flexibility.

Determination would need to be made on how to allocate these reserves to the new unitary councils post-reorganisation. Based on the analysis and the total level of reserves, it is considered that there are sufficient reserves in Staffordshire to manage the costs of transition to the new arrangements.

It is assumed at this stage that any redundancy costs that are to be incurred at the point of reorganisation will be required to be met by the individual predecessor councils. The following issues will need to be considered before the final determination of the proportion of the overall revenue reserves and capital receipts that could be used to finance the transition costs:

- Any usable receipts that have been earmarked to meet capital commitments that have been made by the existing councils
- An ongoing review of the position to have regard to the existing councils' activities in the period up to March 2028
- The level of contingency reserves that will be required to be retained by the new unitary councils

Social Housing Provision and Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs)

Three existing councils (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Cannock Chase District Council and Tamworth Borough Council) have retained and manage their own stock and maintain Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs). While these accounts are ringfenced and, therefore, unaffected by LGR, it is important to contextualise the impact that reorganisation will have.

The consolidation of these HRAs under a larger Unitary structure presents a unique chance to unlock substantial financial savings through economies of scale, optimise resource allocation, and enhance the capacity across the county to build new social housing stock significantly.

Aggregation of the local authority housing stock in Cannock Chase and Tamworth in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire will create greater financial resilience in the aggregated Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It will be important to recognise the impact that reorganisation will have on delivery capabilities and regulatory requirements. The consolidation of these activities under a larger unitary structure presents a unique chance to optimise resource allocation for growth and significantly enhance capacity to build new social housing stock. This opportunity for growth in social housing will be able to be applied across the larger geographic footprint of both Southern and Mid-Staffordshire and North Staffordshire (through

expansion of Stoke-on-Trent's existing stock holding),

Compliance with evolving housing regulations will undoubtedly remain a challenge for the new councils, but their scale will allow them to effectively manage the existing and future social housing assets.

Financial Risk Assessment/Requests for Government Support

The new Unitary Councils must be of sufficient size and balance to take advantage of opportunities to deliver at least expected efficiencies, improve capacity and capability, as well as withstand financial shocks while remaining viable, financially stable and sufficiently financially robust to mitigate against financial pressures in the future.

Figure 26 sets out key financial risks and strategic mitigations, some of which include the requirement of additional Government support.

Financial Risk	Mitigation
Deliverability and Timing of Modelled Savings Large scale transformation projects may slip or deliver lower savings than modelled.	Councils to manage financial pressures proactively through locally controlled measures such as prudent Council tax setting, disciplined reserve stewardship, prioritised investment decisions, forward-looking financial planning, and allocating resources to support LGR. Capacity-building support and flexibility in delivery timelines, alongside contingency funding to manage slippage.
Council Tax Harmonisation Options implemented are lower than modelled, reducing revenue and increasing budget gaps.	Councils to manage financial pressures proactively through locally controlled measures such as prudent Council tax setting, disciplined reserve stewardship, prioritised investment decisions, forward-looking financial planning, and allocating resources to support LGR.
Implementation Costs A significant proportion of the transition investment will be early in the process, including a significant amount to mobilise the new unitary councils. There is a shortfall in the level of reserves that can be invested in upfront implementation costs	The existing Councils will need to recognise the requirement to secure the financial sustainability of the new authorities from day one and the ability of current authorities to maintain services is not jeopardised by the one-off transition costs. These considerations will need to be incorporated into medium term financial planning processes with immediate effect Government support requested: It is likely that the existing local authorities will need to seek a capitalisation direction to enable the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund the transition to the single tier
HRA Budget Pressures Additional financial pressure on HRAs from changes to regulations, challenging the ability to meet specified standards, customer demands and service debt.	Councils to actively manage pressures through locally controlled measures, but the main source of income generation (rents) is defined by national policy. The Self-Financing Settlement in 2012 predated the regulatory changes. Government support requested: A national review of HRA debt and its impact on HRAs would benefit the sector.
MTFP Variances Current MTFPs contain pressures and risks that could require further use of reserves to manage, lowering the availability of reserves to fund changes and give resilience to the new entities. Pressures in adult social care, children's services, and homelessness are high and continuing. Councils implement actions or make decisions before vesting day that affect the future financial position of the new entities, for example implementing Council Tax rises below the maximum allowed or deploying their reserves.	Councils to manage financial pressures proactively through locally controlled measures such as prudent Council tax setting, disciplined reserve stewardship, prioritised investment decisions, forward-looking financial planning, and allocating resources to support LGR. Agreement of guiding principles prior to a Structural Changes Order being issued. Government support requested: Additional flexibility and targeted funding support for high-pressure service areas, particularly adult social care and homelessness.
Fair Funding Review 2.0 Given the status of FFR 2.0, changes to the funding regime have not been factored into the current financial appraisal. A negative outcome for Staffordshire or a reduction in current funding would undermine financial forecasts.	Timely and transparent exemplifications to support accurate financial planning, and transitional funding to mitigate uncertainty.

Financial Risk	Mitigation
Waste Reforms Cost pressures in meeting regulatory reforms, with lack of clarity, certainty or long-term guarantees or visibility of funding.	Government support requested: Clear guidance and full funding support for mandated waste reforms to avoid unfunded cost burdens.
Outcome of the Review of the Dedicated Schools Grant The statutory override protects reserves from the impact of deficits; any changes could create unsustainable budget pressures for new Unitary Councils.	Government support requested: Assurance that the statutory override will remain in place or that alternative protections will be introduced to safeguard financial sustainability.

Figure 26: LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent – Financial Risks and Mitigations including Requests for Government Support

Wider Economic and Social Benefits

The implementation of local government reorganisation across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will have wider economic and social benefits. A cost-benefit analysis (CBA) has undertaken to assess the wider benefits of the proposed two unitary council model.

This analysis builds on the work undertaken within the financial modelling, the results of which have been combined with estimates of the wider economic benefits of the Modified Proposal. The detailed Cost Benefit Analysis Report is detailed at **Appendix D**.

The methodology for the CBA has been developed in line with HM Treasury Green Book guidance, while also adopting key learnings from other LGR proposals across England.

The analysis compares the costs and benefits that are expected to arise under the Modified Proposal. As with the Financial Analysis, the CBA period covers 10 years from 2026/27 to 2035/36 – i.e. 10 years from the start of implementation. All estimates of costs and benefits are in real 2025/26 prices, with the effects of inflation removed using the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR's) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflator index where required.

The potential benefits that could arise from LGR across Staffordshire are considerable and have been grouped in line with the Green Book's four benefit categories:

- **Cash-releasing benefits:** These benefits reduce the costs of organisations in such a way that the resources can be re-allocated elsewhere. This typically means that an entire resource is no longer needed for the task for which it was previously used. This can be staff or materials/assets.
- **Monetisable non-cash-releasing benefits:** These benefits usually involve reducing the time that a particular resource takes to do a particular task, but not sufficiently to re-allocate that resource to a totally different area of work
- **Quantifiable benefits:** These benefits can be quantified, but not always easily. The extent to which quantifiable benefits are measured will depend on their significance
- **Non-quantifiable benefits:** These are the qualitative benefits of the intervention, which are of value to the organisation(s) and/or wider society but cannot be quantified

In total, nine main benefits were identified. Adopting a proportionate approach, this CBA has not attempted to monetise all nine benefits. Rather, the appraisal focuses on two of the nine benefits (i.e., the two benefits which could be monetised most reliably), with the remaining benefits considered qualitatively. All benefit estimates were converted to present values using the social discount rate of 3.5% (per Green Book guidance). **Figure 27** summarises the benefits that will be realised from local government reorganisation.

Monetisable Benefits	
BEN01: Direct cost savings	Significant sustainable financial savings through economies of scale and reduced duplication
BEN02: Economic growth and employment opportunities	Greater capacity to drive economic and employment growth through more coordinated planning and service delivery, stronger local leadership and targeted investment
Qualitative Benefits	
BEN03: Simplification of governance and clearer accountability	Create of single points of accountability, reducing bureaucracy and enhancing democratic visibility. The two new unitary authorities will be empowered to act decisively, plan strategically, and be directly accountable for performance and outcomes.
BEN04: Improved service integration and quality	Will allow for fully integrated service delivery, streamlined service pathways, enhanced digital transformation, and ensure consistent standards of service across the area. It will improve both efficiency and the quality of outcomes in critical areas.
BEN05: Improved long-term strategic planning	Each authority will have the scale, resources and operational capacity to develop and deliver comprehensive place-based strategies, engage more effectively with regional and national partners, plan major infrastructure and investment projects and respond effectively to emerging challenges, such as population growth, climate change, and technological transformation.
BEN06: Strengthening of local identity and community voice	The proposed two-authority model has been chosen specifically to preserve and strengthen local identity. This approach combines the efficiency of scale with the accountability and responsiveness of local governance, maintaining the character and pride of Staffordshire's communities.
BEN07: Workforce and organisational benefits	Reorganisation offers opportunities for improved workforce planning and organisational culture which will support more efficient service delivery and create organisations capable of continuous improvement and innovation.
BEN08: Fairness, consistency, and equity for residents	Reorganisation allows for the harmonisation of policies, charges, and service standards across Staffordshire. Residents will benefit from greater consistency in service access and quality, equitable distribution of resources and investment and simplified access to support and information which will foster a sense of fairness and shared purpose across the county.
BEN09: Foundation for devolution and future growth	The proposed model aligns closely with the Government's devolution framework and positions Staffordshire for a future devolution deal. This forward-looking structure will future-proof local governance and enable sustained growth and prosperity.

Figure 27: Benefits of LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Identified in Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA)

The quantitative results of the CBA are detailed in **Table 20** below.

	Present Value
Costs (C)	
Implementation costs	£89.4m
Aggregation costs	£80.0m
Total costs	£169.4m
Benefits (B)	
Direct cost savings	£355.1m
Economic and employment growth	£52.6m
Total monetised benefits	£407.7m
Net Present Social Value (B – C)	£238.3m
Benefit Cost Ratio	2.4

Table 20: LGR in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent – Economic Results of Cost Benefit Analysis

The table illustrates that the Modified Proposal generates a strong Net Present Social Value (£238m) and Benefit-Cost Ratio (2.4), even when just two of the nine identified benefits have been monetised and included in the calculation. Put simply, in present value terms, every £1 invested in LGR across Staffordshire is expected to generate a minimum social return of £2.40 across the region.

Criterion 3 – High quality and sustainable public services

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

- a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

Improved Local Government and Service Delivery and the Managing the Impacts on Critical Services

Local Government Reorganisation as an Opportunity

The guidance provided for local government reorganisation outlines that proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.

Local government reorganisation gives a decisive opportunity to reset how local services are designed and delivered. The aim is to create a sustainable, financially resilient and locally accountable model of public service delivery across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The proposed two new unitary council structure operating across North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire will provide a balance between strategic capacity and local connection. The proposed structure will enable public services to be designed around people and places, rather than organisational boundaries, and will strengthen each council's ability to withstand future economic, social and environmental shocks.

The new councils will build on the area's history of partnership and innovation, with a clear ambition to secure Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's social and economic future by building a resilient, locally led system of public services that is designed around people, powered by data and disciplined on cost.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's populations are growing and ageing, demand for services is rising and the financial environment is increasingly constrained. Many services remain organised along organisational boundaries that residents neither understand nor experience. The result is duplication, inefficiency and growing financial pressure. The

two unitary model offers a route to reset this system: strengthening financial resilience, removing overlapping layers of governance and unlocking the benefits of integration at place and neighbourhood level.

Improving Service Delivery

Local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is not simply an exercise in structural tidying; it is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to realign functions, funding and accountability around how people live their lives. The current two-tier system fragments responsibility. Strategic services such as highways, education and public health sit at county level, while districts deliver housing, planning, waste collection and leisure. This separation often drives duplication, slow decision-making and blurred lines of accountability.

The two new unitary council structures will provide the clarity and coherence required to deliver modern, financially sustainable and integrated public services. Aggregating overlapping county and district functions into single accountable bodies will reduce duplication, unlock economies of scale and create the capacity to plan across whole-system priorities such as health, housing and growth. At the same time, careful disaggregation of current county and city council functions to North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire will allow services to be tailored to the distinct needs of each geography; urban and industrial in the North, more rural and dispersed in the South.

The overarching principle for the approach to service design is “**integration where it adds value, localisation where it builds trust.**” Strategic functions, such as commissioning, safeguarding and regulatory oversight, may benefit from being shared or aligned across both councils, ensuring consistency and resilience. But services that depend on relationships and local knowledge, such as housing, community safety and public realm, will be devolved to the lowest effective level, enabling neighbourhood leadership and community participation.

This balance between aggregation and disaggregation lays the foundation for a genuinely place-led system: one where governance follows outcomes, not bureaucracy. It will create the opportunities for wider public service reform which are explored in more detail in the section that follows. It also creates the structural conditions for the kind of neighbourhood empowerment and local leadership that will be explored further under **Criterion 6**; ensuring the unitary reform delivers not only efficiency and resilience, but also democratic renewal and stronger local connection.

Under this model, Stoke-on-Trent’s functions aggregate with the new North Staffordshire unitary; all other services are disaggregated by default into the two new unitary councils, with shared working only where it clearly adds value.

In order to achieve the necessary local government structures and improvement in service delivery, the two new unitary model will be built on the five principles set out in *Figure 28*.

Finance led sustainability	Every decision must support long-term financial resilience. The two new unitary councils will be developed with a joint financial strategy focused on debt reduction, reserve strengthening and service efficiency
Integration by default	Services will be designed around people and places, not silos or departments. This means shared commissioning, joint accountability and integrated neighbourhood teams delivering prevention and early intervention across health, housing, education and social care
Clear local accountability	The two new unitary councils will operate with fewer, simpler and clearer layers of governance. Decision making will be transparent, rooted in place and supported by local area committees that bring residents and councillors together to shape priorities
Prevention and resilience	Services will prioritise early help and prevention, reducing crisis demand and failure demand. Local intelligence and neighbourhood relationships will drive proactive support rather than reactive intervention
Growth and infrastructure as enablers of wellbeing	The two new unitary councils will integrate spatial planning, housing, transport and economic development to ensure that public services and infrastructure investment drive inclusive growth and community wellbeing. Aggregation and disaggregation: Designing services that work for people and place

Figure 28: Service Improvement: Principles for Focus

Adult Social Care: Independence, capacity and long-term viability

Adult Social Care (ASC) in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent faces rising demand, growing complexity and market fragility. ASC accounts for more than 30% of council spend, staff vacancy rates average 14%, fees have risen ahead of inflation, and the county has a higher-than-average older population (22.4% vs. 18.7% nationally). These pressures reinforce the need for sustainable commissioning, strong market-shaping capacity and integration with health, housing and community partners.

The two new unitary model will balance strategic coherence with local responsiveness. North Staffordshire will prioritise early intervention, workforce stability and community health partnerships. Southern and Mid-Staffordshire will focus on preventative housing-with-care and integrated rural support models. Each authority would have its own Director of Adult Social Services, accountable locally and aligned to the Integrated Care System (ICS) footprint.

Vision - Every adult has the opportunity to live well, remain independent and exercise meaningful choice and control. Services will focus on prevention, community-based support and market resilience, working seamlessly across health, housing and VCSE partners, with clear financial discipline and adaptive leadership through change.

Delivery priorities - Delivering sustainable ASC requires a shift toward earlier intervention, seamless support across organisations and a confident, skilled and stable workforce. The two new unitary model creates the platform for a clearer, more accountable and prevention-focused system, underpinned by aligned commissioning and workforce development. Key delivery priorities include:

- Prevention first through neighbourhood teams integrating ASC, housing, health and VCSE

- Integrated commissioning and market shaping for specialist provision and the Better Care Fund
- Local accountability with clear senior oversight and outcome focus
- Workforce resilience via shared training and recruitment pipelines

Market pressures and evidence - Staffordshire County Council's Market Sustainability Plan (2023) highlights significant structural fragility in the ASC market, including high staff vacancy rates (14%), occupancy levels below optimal sustainability thresholds (81% residential and 84% nursing), six provider failures since 2022 and around 30 homes assessed as being at moderate-to-high financial risk. These pressures reinforce the need for a more resilient commissioning environment with clearer locality oversight, early intervention capability and shared specialist expertise. The establishment of two unitary authorities enables both strategic market-shaping across the wider footprint and faster local intervention where individual providers face operational or financial challenge, helping maintain quality and continuity for residents.

Integration - Working alongside the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS, the two unitary model will enable more consistent neighbourhood-level prevention and early intervention. This will be achieved through shared population health data, integrated community delivery teams and pooled resources including the Better Care Fund (BCF). The approach builds on existing Family Hub infrastructure and learning from Dorset's unitary model, where joint commissioning and co-located, teams have strengthened housing-with-care pathways and reduced avoidable demand. Further detail on delivery mechanisms, governance and neighbourhood leadership arrangements is set out in the Public Service Reform section.

Transforming Children's Services

Children's Services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent face sustained pressure from rising demand, greater complexity of need, high placement costs and variation in outcomes. Children Looked After population levels are above the national average, and spending has increased significantly to meet demand. Establishing two new unitary authorities; North Staffordshire (including Stoke-on-Trent) and Southern and Mid- Staffordshire, creates a once in a generation opportunity to reset the system architecture, strengthen local accountability and design services that are closer to families, financially sustainable and focused on prevention.

Vision - Every child grows up safe, supported and ready to thrive. Services will intervene early, build strong family and community networks and provide specialist help where needed. Practice will be evidence-led, co-produced with families and rooted in stable, skilled local leadership. Equity, continuity and safeguarding consistency will underpin transition arrangements.

Delivery priorities - Delivering sustainable and high-quality Children's Services requires earlier intervention, local leadership, market reform and confident, well-supported practitioners. The two unitary model creates stronger democratic accountability, localised decision-making and a coherent approach to specialist commissioning. Key delivery priorities include:

- **Earlier help and prevention aligned to local need and community assets**
- **Localised family support and safeguarding leadership**
- **Shared commissioning scale for specialist placements and SEND services**
- **A stable workforce and consistent practice model supported by joint recruitment, training and supervision frameworks**

- **Clear safeguarding continuity through a strengthened partnership model across the footprint.**

Each authority will appoint a dedicated Director of Children's Services (DCS), with aligned governance to retain cross-area learning and consistency, particularly for high-cost specialist services and SEND.

Market pressures and evidence - Demand continues to rise across the area. As of January 2024, Staffordshire had 1,345 looked-after children (72 per 10,000), above the England average (70 per 10,000). The Children's Services budget has increased 152% since 2009 to keep pace with demand (SCC, 2024). Stoke-on-Trent carries an even higher level of demand, with 1,156 looked-after children and the highest rate in England - 191 per 10,000 (DfE, March 2024).

High placement costs and market fragility reflect national challenges. Staffordshire allocated £18.1m for non-disability residential placements in 2023/24; projected spend is £24.2m (a £6.1m overspend) (SCC Cabinet, Aug 2023). Complex cases average around £7,500 per week (SCC Residential Options Appraisal, 2023), above the national mean of c.£6,100/week (NAO, 2024). The 2023-26 Sufficiency Strategy commits to increasing local residential capacity and reducing distant placements. Stoke-on-Trent faces similar pressures, with average external placement costs around £1,327 per week and a parallel focus on growing local supply.

The two new unitary model strengthens the commissioning environment through joint market-shaping for specialist placements, aligned sufficiency strategies and targeted local sufficiency building, including foster, kinship and residential provision, supported by local provider growth and micro-providers.

Ensuring stable, local care - Placement sufficiency remains a core challenge, with external reliance driving cost and distance-from-home placements. The two new unitary councils will:

- **Build local foster, kinship and residential capacity**
- **Support local provider growth and micro-provision**
- **Maintain shared commissioning for complex placements**
- **Strengthen safeguarding, quality assurance and performance oversight locally**

Learning from Cumbria demonstrates that two geographically coherent unitary footprints can enhance accountability and safeguarding and provide stable oversight during transition.

Improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND - The number of children with complex needs continues to rise across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, placing sustained pressure on specialist placements, therapies and transport. Around 4.7% of pupils in Staffordshire and c.5.5% in Stoke-on-Trent hold an EHCP (Jan 2024), broadly in line with the national rising trend (5.3% in 2025). Staffordshire's 2022 Ofsted/CQC revisit confirmed progress in 6 of 8 areas, with ongoing improvement needed in co-production and EHC plan quality. Stoke-on-Trent's 2024 inspection identified inconsistent experiences and outcomes, requiring strengthened delivery. SEND home-to-school transport also continues to rise, with Staffordshire's spend reaching £30.77m in 2024/25 (a c.13.6% annual increase), and Stoke-on-Trent reporting c.£9.37m in 2023/24 with overspend pressures.

The two new unitary council model will enable stronger place-based SEND leadership, more targeted commissioning of therapies and specialist placements and more efficient local transport planning, while retaining shared expertise and consistency across the system. It will also support smoother transitions into adulthood through integrated planning with colleges, skills providers, housing and employers.

Integration - The model strengthens partnership working across education, health, community services and VCSE organisations. Local Early Help teams, Family Hubs and safeguarding partnerships will operate within each unitary, aligned to local need, while joint arrangements will retain specialist expertise and ensure consistent standards. Alignment with the ICS footprint enables joint planning for complex health and care packages, shared workforce initiatives and consistent pathways into adulthood. Further detail on neighbourhood delivery, shared outcomes and partnership governance is set out in the Public Service Reform section. The vision for wider public services across the two new unitary councils is built on integration, local accountability and financial resilience. Services will be designed and delivered closer to communities, with shared capacity retained only where scale delivers better value, specialist capability or system resilience.

Public Health

Public Health functions are currently delivered separately by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke City Council. Under the two unitary model, statutory duties, the Public Health Grant and strategic commissioning will be fully disaggregated, with each new authority assuming direct accountability for improving population health.

Each council will appoint its own Director of Public Health, ensuring strong place-based leadership, democratic accountability and prevention strategies tailored to local need. Collaboration will continue only where it strengthens outcomes or efficiency, for example, in health protection, emergency planning, public health intelligence and ICS-wide planning, retaining shared capability where scale matters while embedding local leadership by default.

Public Health Grant allocations in both areas provide a strong platform for prevention, covering mandated functions and wider population-health programmes delivered through NHS and VCSE partners.

Significant health inequalities reinforce the need for targeted local action. North Staffordshire experiences higher deprivation and lower life expectancy than Southern and Mid-Staffordshire, requiring proportionate universalism, with a focus on smoking, alcohol-related harm, cardiovascular disease (CVD) and employment-related health, while supporting healthy ageing and long-term-conditions management in more rural parts of the area.

Prevention will be embedded in neighbourhood delivery, linking public health, housing, social care, schools and the VCSE sector. This enables data-driven targeting, Neighbourhood Area Committee (NAC) level community investment and joint planning with the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent ICS. Disaggregation supports tailored responses to industrial health challenges and rural isolation, while retaining shared capacity for specialist functions and statutory responsibilities.

Vision - Every resident has the opportunity to live a healthy, fulfilling life, supported by locally led prevention, targeted action on health inequalities and strong neighbourhood partnerships across health, housing, education and the VCSE sector.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Targeted neighbourhood prevention aligned to NACs and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs)**
- **Shared public health intelligence functions to drive equitable outcomes**
- **Joint commissioning for specialist services where scale improves value**
- **Data-driven interventions for smoking, obesity, alcohol and CVD**
- **Embedding public health roles across housing, schools and community safety**

Community Safety and Resilience

Community safety and resilience functions are currently distributed across county and district tiers, with shared responsibility for crime prevention, anti-social behaviour, emergency planning and trading standards. Under the two new unitary model, these functions will be fully disaggregated, with each council assuming end-to-end accountability for community safety, local enforcement and resilience planning.

Each council will host its own Community Safety Partnership (CSP) aligned to local policing teams, fire and rescue services and neighbourhood governance structures. Day-to-day enforcement and community safety activity will therefore be locally led, intelligence-driven and responsive to neighbourhood priorities. Specialist and statutory functions, notably emergency planning, civil contingencies and

regulatory coordination, will continue collaboratively through a shared Resilience Forum, ensuring consistent standards and joint response capacity across the area. This approach will ensure responsive local safety and enforcement, underpinned by coordinated capability for cross-boundary risks and emergencies.

Vision - Safe, confident and resilient neighbourhoods where residents shape priorities and partners work together to prevent harm before it occurs.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Integrating housing, environmental health and community safety teams at neighbourhood level**
- **Using shared data to identify risk and intervene early**
- **Supporting local volunteer and resilience networks through NACs**
- **Retaining shared emergency planning for major-incident response**
- **Embedding community safety within INTs and NACs to tackle anti-social behaviour and promote social cohesion**

Housing

Housing responsibilities are currently split between Staffordshire County Council and the district councils, with the county holding strategic housing-related support functions and districts leading on planning, supply and the management of local authority housing. Three existing councils (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Cannock Chase District Council and Tamworth Borough Council) have retained and manage their own stock. The two-tier structure creates fragmentation between planning, health, care and prevention.

Under the two new unitary councils, housing will be fully disaggregated, with each council accountable for strategy, enabling, regulation and partnerships with registered providers. This integrates housing with health, care, prevention and infrastructure. Shared approaches will apply only where value is clear, for example, joint procurement of housing-with-care, data sharing and strategic engagement with Homes England and regional partners.

Aggregation of the local authority housing stock in Cannock Chase and Tamworth in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire will create greater financial resilience in the aggregated Housing Revenue Account (HRA). It will be important to recognise the impact that reorganisation will have on the delivery capabilities and regulatory requirements. The consolidation of these activities under a larger unitary structure presents a unique chance to optimise resource allocation and significantly enhance the capacity to build new social housing stock. This opportunity for growth in social housing will be able to be applied across the larger geographic footprint of both Southern and Mid-Staffordshire and North Staffordshire (through expansion of Stoke-on-Trent's existing stock holding). Compliance with evolving housing regulations will undoubtedly remain a challenge for the new councils but their scale will allow them to effectively manage the existing and future social housing assets.

Vision – Every resident has a safe, affordable and suitable home that supports independence, wellbeing and economic participation.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Aligning housing, public health, ASC and transport planning**
- **Expanding housing-with-care and supported living**
- **Driving retrofit, regeneration and local green-skills development**
- **Delivering neighbourhood-scale renewal through NACs**
- **Using data to plan for demand, affordability and demographic change**
- **Using NAC budgets and VCSE partnerships for early help and outreach**
- **Commissioning supported housing and tenancy-sustainment pathways**
- **Sharing data to operate a single homelessness intelligence view**
- **Co-designing services with people with lived experience**

Homelessness

Homelessness and rough sleeping duties currently sit with district councils, creating fragmented pathways and missed prevention opportunities. Under the two new unitary councils, all duties; prevention, relief, temporary accommodation and support commissioning, will sit with each authority, embedding homelessness prevention within INTs. Disaggregation supports faster decision-making, earlier intervention and stronger accountability, with services designed and delivered by people who know local communities best. Collaboration will be retained only where scale adds value, for example, specialist provision or joint bids to national programmes.

Vision – Homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring through early help and locally accountable support.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Embedding homelessness prevention within INTs and NACs**

Highways and Transport

Highways and transport responsibilities in Staffordshire are currently held by the county council, with districts influencing local priorities through planning and place-shaping. Stoke-on-Trent as a unitary council has the responsibilities in the city area.

Under the proposed model, these functions will be fully disaggregated to the two new unitary councils. Each will take end-to-end accountability for network management, asset maintenance, local transport planning and contracts (including supported bus services and active travel).

This realignment will bring significant improvements to the strategic planning of these functions. For example, in Staffordshire Moorlands in the North of the county, there is a feeling that its local priorities are overlooked in the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan with its priorities being focussed on the core of the county geography. This has impacts for key services such as infrastructure investment and public transport planning and provision. For example- the Staffordshire Moorlands currently relies on many bus services that are planned for and delivered by Stoke-on-Trent, a different transport authority.

The more appropriate concentrated geography of the proposed two new councils will offer an opportunity for a step-change in highways and transport related services in areas in the North of the County.

There will be further improvements once the Strategic Authority emerges as it will ensure a regional approach to addressing public transport matters.

Each unitary council will have its own highways and transport functions with shared working used only where scale or continuity clearly adds value - for example, on strategic schemes that cross the North /Southern and Mid-Staffordshire boundary, traffic control centres, or resilience during severe weather.

Vision - A safe, reliable and decarbonising network enabling access to services and inclusive growth.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Integrating highways and street scene to deliver “one visit, multiple fixes”**
- **Using asset data to prioritise investment and maintenance**
- **Providing demand-responsive transport for rural communities**
- **Aligning bus service improvements to employment and education routes**
- **Allocating NAC small-works budgets for local priorities (e.g. crossings, 20mph zones, dropped kerbs) are delivered quickly**

Waste

Waste collection is currently district-led, with disposal at county and city level. This division between collection and disposal creates inefficiencies in logistics, data and recycling performance. The variance in the proportion of waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (from 2021/22 to 2023/24) set out in **Table 21** illustrates the differences between the waste collection authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent where the proportions in 2023/24 ranged between the lowest in Stoke-on-Trent (37.0%) to the highest in Staffordshire Moorlands (54.5%).

Local Authority	% of Waste Sent for Reuse, Recycling or Composting		
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Cannock Chase	41.9	40.1	40.0
East Staffordshire	41.8	38.6	42.3
Lichfield	45.2	44.3	45.1
Newcastle-under-Lyme	47.5	45.8	46.1
South Staffordshire	45.5	43.9	45.6
Stafford	46.4	44.6	45.4
Staffordshire Moorlands	54.5	53.2	54.5
Stoke-on-Trent	34.5	33.7	37.0
Tamworth	38.1	35.4	38.9

Table 21: % of waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (from 2021/22 to 2023/24) (Source: DEFRA)

There has been a longstanding commitment in Staffordshire to collaboration and joint working through the Staffordshire Joint Waste Board, which has more recently evolved into the Staffordshire Sustainability Board. These collaborative arrangements have resulted in several beneficial joint approaches including the commissioning of recycling contracts. However local differences have always frustrated the opportunities to approach waste collection and disposal on a county-based approach.

There are a number of existing collaborative arrangements including in Lichfield and Tamworth where there is a joint collection service across the two local authority areas. In the North of the county, Staffordshire Moorlands has developed a local authority-controlled company with neighbouring authorities High Peak in Derbyshire (its Strategic Alliance partner) and Cheshire East Council. Both arrangements have generated significant financial benefits and could provide a platform for scaling across the new unitary councils.

Under the two new unitary councils, all waste functions; collection, recycling and disposal, will sit within each authority, creating clear accountability and integrated waste systems.

Collaboration will remain an option where scale benefits residents, for example, joint procurement of treatment facilities or shared data systems to track performance and costs.

Vision - A circular, zero-waste future where residents, businesses and councils work together to reduce waste, increase recycling and minimise cost through prevention and innovation.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Unifying contracts and fleets to improve efficiency and standardisation**
- **Investing in circular-economy and reuse infrastructure**
- **Using NAC funds to support local litter, reuse and recycling initiatives**
- **Deploying digital routing, sensors and performance dashboards**
- **Sharing innovation capacity where scale drives value**

Economic Development

Economic development functions are currently divided between Staffordshire County Council (strategic planning, skills, transport infrastructure) and the district councils (local business engagement, regeneration and inward investment). Under the two new unitary structure, each council will lead the full suite of economic functions, strategic growth, inward investment, regeneration and business support.

Both councils will lead their own place-based economic strategies aligned to local strengths: advanced manufacturing, universities and logistics in North Staffordshire (including Stoke-on-Trent) and clean growth, tourism and rural enterprise in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire. Shared working will be retained where scale or shared assets make collaboration beneficial, for example, on major inward investment promotion, skills alignment through the Local Skills Improvement Plan and cross-boundary transport or digital infrastructure projects. This will come to life when the new strategic authority is created with its associated additional devolved powers and funding.

Tourism is also an important consideration in the North of the county particularly in Staffordshire Moorlands as it provides the gateway to the Peak District National Park and home to the Churnet Valley, and Alton Towers.

Local government reorganisation presents the opportunity to embed the principles of localised procurement and the circular economy to achieve inclusive growth; and when created the two unitary councils will be in a position to lay the foundations for the Strategic Authority's Local Growth Plan.

Disaggregating economic development will give each new council direct control over its growth levers while enabling targeted collaboration where joint opportunity exists. It will ensure that economic strategy is rooted in local identity and need, while still contributing to a coherent area-wide prosperity agenda. The modification of boundaries requested in this proposal will provide for a more equal distribution of growth opportunities across the two areas.

Vision – Inclusive, productive and place-led economies that support resilient public finances and stronger communities.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Aligning spatial planning, housing and transport to maximise benefit**
- **Devolving growth and skills funding to NACs**
- **Connecting employment, education and health strategies**
- **Partnering with anchor institutions to build skills pipelines and social value**
- **Leveraging shared decarbonisation and infrastructure programmes where scale helps**
- **Preparation for the creation of the new Strategic Authority to ensure that the local challenges are recognised in its design**



Libraries and Culture

Library and cultural services are currently delivered by both Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent Council, with some district councils maintaining local heritage, museums and event programmes. Under the proposed two unitary model, these services will be fully disaggregated, with each unitary shaping its own cultural strategy, reflecting urban and creative-industry assets in North Staffordshire and heritage and rural culture in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire. Shared systems will be retained where efficiency or access benefits residents.

The funding allocated to libraries and cultural services has diminished to some extent over recent years with the upper-tier authorities having to prioritise core statutory services such as care services.

Disaggregating library and cultural services gives each new council the ability to shape new distinctive cultural offers that reflect local identity and priorities, while maintaining shared access to the digital infrastructure and archives that preserve Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's collective story. In Staffordshire, the responsibility for the delivery of libraries in localities has been transferred to local community groups.

Vision – Libraries and cultural venues as centres of learning, creativity and belonging that strengthen wellbeing, inclusion and civic pride.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Co-locating libraries with family hubs, learning centres and community health services to create multifunctional local anchors**
- **Expanding digital access and literacy, using the library network to expand access to online services, supporting residents to engage with employment, education and council services**

- **Supporting community-led cultural programming via NAC grants**
- **Continuing to develop community led provision of local libraries**
- **Positioning libraries as gateways for volunteering, youth engagement and adult learning, in partnership with colleges and the VCSE sector**
- **Linking culture with tourism and place regeneration to attract visitors and stimulate local economies**

Street Scene

Street scene services, including grounds maintenance, street cleansing, litter collection and environmental enforcement, are currently delivered by district councils, with some strategic coordination at county level. Under the proposed two unitary model, these functions will be fully disaggregated, giving each new council end-to-end responsibility for maintaining public spaces, parks and local environments.

This disaggregation will bring decision-making closer to residents and enable each council to shape its service standards and investment around local geography and priorities. North Staffordshire will focus on urban regeneration, high-footfall areas and industrial estates, while Southern and Mid-Staffordshire will prioritise rural and market-town maintenance, biodiversity and tourism assets. Shared contracts or procurement frameworks will be considered only where they demonstrably improve value for money or resilience, for example, shared fleet procurement or joint waste-to-energy infrastructure.

Vision - Clean, safe and well-maintained public spaces that reflect local pride and civic ownership.

Key opportunities for improvements include:

- **Integrated neighbourhood delivery - combining street scene teams with housing, community safety and highways maintenance to deliver rapid, place-based responses**
- **Prevention and early action - shifting focus from reactive clearance to proactive environmental improvement, greening and climate resilience**
- **Community volunteering and social value - supporting parish councils, community groups and local businesses to adopt green spaces, deliver local improvement projects and build civic pride**
- **Data-driven resource targeting - using sensors, resident feedback and GIS data to direct teams to hotspots and measure impact in real time**
- **Shared learning and innovation - maintaining a joint Street Scene Forum between the two councils to test innovations (e.g. electric fleets, smart bins, biodiversity mapping)**



Leisure

Leisure services across Staffordshire are currently delivered by a mix of district councils and the county council, often via arms-length trusts or companies. For example, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles manages leisure and cultural facilities for Cannock Chase District Council. Meanwhile, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and High Peak Borough Council have established a new council-owned company (Alliance Leisure Limited) responsible for the delivery of leisure and wellbeing services.

Under the proposed two unitary model, leisure services will be fully disaggregated into the North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire councils. By disaggregating leisure, the areas will be able to tailor leisure strategies to the distinct geographies, for example an urban-regeneration-led leisure offer in the North and a rural-wellbeing and tourism-aligned offer in the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire area.

Each unitary will assume full accountability for leisure facility management, local programming, health-and-wellbeing promotion and partnerships with the VCSE sector. At the same time, each council will retain the option to share or commission services jointly where there is a strong business case, for example, joint procurement of large-scale facilities, cross-border leisure memberships, or county-wide branding and marketing platforms.

Consolidation of commissioning arrangements for leisure management will provide a significant opportunity for each of the two unitary councils.

Vision - Leisure as a core pillar of health, inclusion and place-making, supporting active lifestyles and reducing future demand on health and care.

Key opportunities for improvements include:

- **Co-locating leisure centres with family hubs, libraries and health services**
- **Targeting active-lifestyle programmes at high-risk groups**
- **Devolving funding to NACs for community-run clubs and activities**
- **Sharing digital membership platforms to enable scale and consistency**
- **Linking leisure with tourism, culture and town-centre renewal**

Corporate and Support Services

Each of the existing principal councils has its own arrangements for corporate and support services. There are a number of shared services arrangements e.g. joint management arrangements in Stafford and Cannock Chase and the Strategic Alliance with High Peak in Staffordshire Moorlands. Under the two new unitary councils, corporate services will be aggregated from districts and Stoke-on-Trent into two strategic corporate centres and disaggregated from Staffordshire County Council across both authorities. This will realise significant financial savings that will be able to be redirected into front-line service delivery.

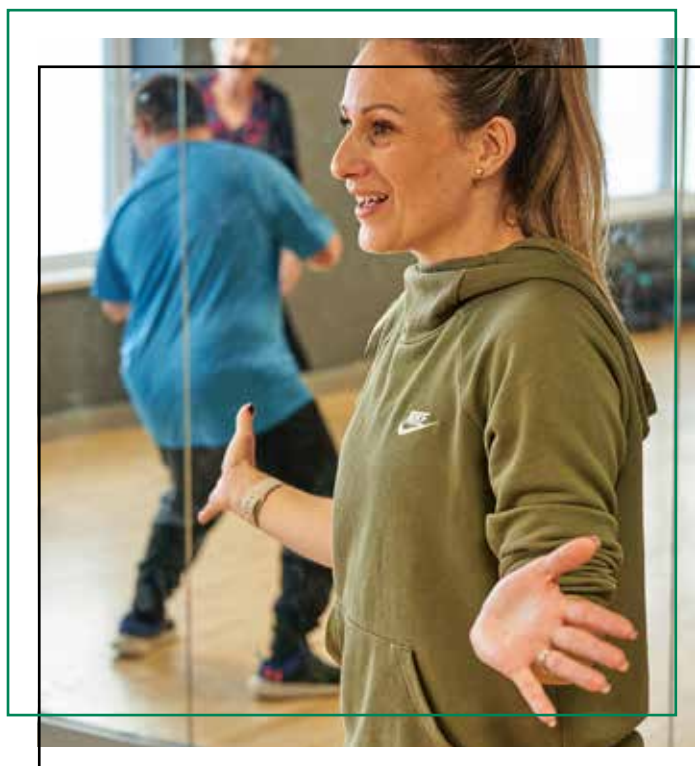
There will be opportunities for shared services across the two unitary councils, but this will be used by exception where they enhance resilience or value, for example, cyber security, procurement platforms, legal specialisms or payroll.

A “design once, adopt twice” approach will ensure consistency across both councils, while allowing local tailoring. Transition will prioritise workforce stability, customer-facing continuity and phased system migration.

Vision - Modern, digitally enabled and financially resilient corporate functions that protect frontline delivery, drive efficiency and support innovation.

Key improvement opportunities include:

- **Sharing digital, data and infrastructure where scale delivers benefits**
- **Jointly procuring services and commercial frameworks**
- **Building shared centres of excellence (audit, procurement, cyber)**
- **Operating common performance and intelligence frameworks**
- **Developing shared workforce and talent pipelines**
- **Implementing cloud-based, interoperable platforms aligned to NACs and INTs**



Disaggregation of Services

One of the major concerns is that splitting the existing county boundaries on a North/South basis will create significant risks in the disaggregation of the upper services such as social care.

It is important to note that in creating two new unitary authorities there will not be a requirement to create brand new social care systems and functions, as there are already two existing social care systems provided by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council. The requirement for this option will be to expand the Stoke-on-Trent system and scale down the Staffordshire system. The disaggregation of the Staffordshire data will, however, need some focus.

Given the different challenges faced in the predominantly urban Stoke-on-Trent and mixed urban/rural service challenges in the rest of Staffordshire, the service delivery models of Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County

Council are tailored accordingly. The social care services are regulated and are subject to rigorous review, which ensures that they are managed effectively. The creation of new models for social care delivery that reflect the new demands in the new unitary councils will need to be a priority in the transition to the new unitary councils.

The Modified Proposal introduces the requirement for further disaggregation of data from the East Staffordshire and Stafford Boroughs to recognise the requested modification of boundaries. The financial analysis has recognised this requirement, and additional costs have been included to account for it. It is considered however that this will not introduce a significant additional scale of complexity, as the disaggregation of county-based data will not be all based on district council boundaries (all existing county services are not currently delivered on this basis) in any case and will also require considerations other than merely the district boundaries.

Opportunities for Wider Public Service Reform

Context and Ambition

Local Government Reorganisation offers a transformative platform to strengthen place-based leadership, embed community priorities and deliver integrated, preventative public services across North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire. The proposed two-unitary configuration aligns with existing public sector geographies, ensuring strong partnership coherence across the NHS Integrated Care System, Police and Crime Commissioner area and other regional agencies. With balanced population sizes across North Staffordshire (c.536,000) and Southern and Mid- Staffordshire (c.598,000), the model provides the scale needed for strategic reform while preserving local identity and governance.

Reorganisation as a Strategic Opportunity

Building on this foundation, LGR enables a move beyond legacy two-tier arrangements to create two coherent, locally accountable unitary councils. This provides the platform to maximise public service reform opportunities across health, care, housing and community wellbeing. The proposal has been shaped through a detailed understanding of the local context, engagement with members, residents, officers, town and parish councils and community stakeholders and a forward-looking vision for long-term improvements in public service outcomes and democratic accountability.

The ambition is to:

- Establish locally accountable unitary councils that are coherent, efficient and responsive
- Embed place-based leadership that reflects local identity, priorities and strengths
- Enable transformation across public services through integration, innovation and community engagement

Both proposed unitary councils possess sufficient population, fiscal diversity and institutional capacity to deliver sustainable reform and withstand future financial shocks, while enabling localised responsiveness through place-based governance.

Principles Driving the Ambition

This proposal is underpinned by principles that reinforce opportunities for public service reform:

- **Local distinctiveness:** Preserve and enhance the unique character and priorities of communities in both North Staffordshire (including Stoke-on-Trent) and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
- **Outcome-focused design and system alignment:** Reorganisation must be driven by outcomes: better services, stronger democracy, improved financial resilience. Reform is a mechanism to join up fragmented services, working seamlessly with NHS, policing, housing and regional partners
- **Community voice:** Service design and delivery must reflect the priorities of residents, businesses and local organisations

Reorganisation as a Platform for Transformation

Local government reorganisation provides the catalyst and conditions for meaningful whole system transformation, particularly in relation to the delivery of integrated, preventative services:

- **Transformational approach:** The two-unitary model rethinks how services are integrated and delivered, rather than simply transferring existing functions
- **Neighbourhood model:** Services will be person-centred, preventative and coordinated across health, care, housing and community wellbeing
- **Expanded housing functions:** Both unitary councils can extend Housing Revenue Account provision to address housing supply and quality
- **Sub-regional coordination:** Skills, business support, economic growth and the visitor economy can be aligned within each unitary and with the wider strategic authority
- **Efficiencies and resilience:** Collaboration or shared services may be explored where a clear business case exists, while each unitary retains operational autonomy
- **Cultural renewal:** Establish new ways of working that enable collaboration, innovation and adaptive service delivery

Aligning Scale with Local Responsiveness

Current two-tier arrangements across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent create duplication, blurred accountability and disjointed delivery across key services, particularly social care, housing, public health and prevention.

Current council boundaries and service responsibilities do not always reflect how people live their lives or how services are accessed, reinforcing the case for reform around coherent, functional geographies that better align with communities and everyday patterns of need.

A two unitary model provides a platform to:

- Align strategic reform at scale with genuine local responsiveness.
- Integrate service delivery across health, care, housing and community wellbeing.
- Drive prevention and early intervention through locality-based governance.
- Achieve sustainable efficiencies through workforce planning and data systems.

This approach mitigates both fragmentation (from multiple disconnected bodies) and over-centralisation (under a single county-wide authority). It establishes two coherent, locally accountable reform platforms, each capable of delivering joined-up, preventative public services rooted in place, while providing the scale and capacity to absorb financial shocks and achieve long-term value for money.

Case for Transformation

Current two-tier arrangements in Staffordshire create structural and operational barriers that hinder public service reform. Fragmented delivery, duplication and limited integration across health, social care, housing and other services impede efficiency and constrain joint commissioning, data sharing and aligned budgeting.

Enabling Integrated, Preventative Public Services

The two fully disaggregated unitary councils will provide a coherent platform for integrated, preventative services designed around people, not organisations. By consolidating responsibilities within North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire, the councils can:

- **Integrate service delivery:** Align housing, social care, health and community safety to provide seamless, person-centred support
- **Use shared intelligence:** Develop robust data systems to enable early intervention and proactive management of demand
- **Align budgets strategically:** Focus resources on prevention and community resilience
- **Co-commission with partners:** Collaborate with NHS, VCSE and Police to deliver better outcomes efficiently
- **Devolve decision-making:** Empower communities to shape local services, improving responsiveness and accountability

These reforms build on the current local focus on integration and prevention. Over recent years, partnership initiatives between the County Council, NHS Integrated Care System and district councils have begun to align health, care and housing functions; reducing hospital discharge delays, improving data sharing and embedding prevention-led commissioning to manage demand more effectively. The proposed two-unitary model provides the scale and structural coherence to amplify these successes across the whole county.

Using the Existing Conditions to Deliver Public Sector Reform

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent already have a strong track record of partnership working and innovation, providing a solid foundation for transformation that can be scaled and enhanced under a two-unitary model.

- **Cross-boundary collaboration:** The Staffordshire Moorlands and High Peak Strategic Alliance has demonstrated effective joint service delivery and management since 2008
- **Public Sector Reform Programme:** Initiatives in children's services, NHS-social care integration and the One Public Estate programme show a system-wide focus on place-based delivery
- **Housing retrofit and social care collaboration:** The High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands Housing Retrofit Action Plan illustrates joint baselining, improvement strategies and cross-geography collaboration
- **Innovation through Local Authority Trading Companies and Wholly Owned Companies (LATCs/WOCs):** LATCs/WOCs offer tested platforms for shared services, innovation and efficiency that can be scaled county-wide

By building on these foundations, the two-unitary model maximises opportunities for reform while mitigating risks of fragmentation or inefficiency. Each unitary council will have fully disaggregated responsibilities, providing both the autonomy and scale to innovate and deliver neighbourhood-focused, preventative services.

Opportunities for Public Sector Reform

The two-unitary model balances scale and subsidiarity to accelerate reform across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The new North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils present opportunities to create joined-up, preventative, person-centred services delivered effectively at a local level. Under the current two-tier system, duplication and a lack of clarity around organisational accountability impede early intervention.

Reorganisation provides the basis for a more coherent approach to reform, enabling integration across functions, clearer lines of organisational, place-based responsibility and a renewed focus on prevention and community wellbeing. Importantly, the new model supports locally provided, person-centred support, where decisions are made closer to communities and tailored to their unique needs, assets and pressures.

Financially, while disaggregation involves upfront transition costs of (approximately £215 million), recurrent efficiency savings are projected at £69 million per annum by year 5, with a payback period of 3.9 years. These resources can be reinvested in front-line, preventative and neighbourhood-focused services.

Figure 29 sets out the key public sector reform opportunities.

	Opportunity Under Two Unitary Model	Anticipated Impact/Evidence Link
Adult and Children's Social Care (North Staffordshire)	Integration of Stoke-on-Trent City and Staffordshire County Council social care functions under a single North Staffordshire unitary. Commitment to transformational, preventative, person-centred approach.	Single coherent care system able to invest in prevention and early help, reducing duplication and demand pressures. Dorset and Durham unitary models demonstrate 8 - 12% reduction in placement costs and delayed transfers of care.
Adult and Children's Social Care (South and Mid-Staffordshire)	Safe disaggregation of Staffordshire County Council services; future focus on local partnership delivery and community-based prevention models.	Ensures continuity while creating scope for long-term innovation and efficiency. Cornwall's post-LGR model improved outcomes through local integration of health and care teams.
Housing and Homelessness Prevention	Expansion of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) powers to establish HRAs across both unitary councils.	Enables direct investment in affordable homes, improved social housing management and homelessness prevention. Wiltshire and Cheshire East evidence increased capacity to tackle housing supply and temporary accommodation costs.
Neighbourhood Model and Prevention	Reconfigure services around localities and neighbourhoods, embedding community hubs linking health, care, housing and VCSE partners.	Builds resilience, strengthens local accountability and unlocks cost avoidance through prevention. Norfolk and Shropshire models show reductions in crisis interventions.
Transport and Connectivity	Localised planning of public transport to meet rural and urban connectivity challenges.	More responsive network design, targeted investment, reduced isolation and improved access to jobs/education. Northumberland evidence shows local control increases ridership and satisfaction.
Skills, Business Support and Growth	Sub-regional collaboration with Strategic Authority to align skills, business support, inward investment and visitor economy strategies.	Strengthens economic resilience, supports levelling up and enables coherent sub-regional growth. Reflects success in North Yorkshire and Somerset.
Cross-System Integration (NHS, Police, VCSE)	Alignment of housing, benefits and support services with NHS, Mental Health Trusts and Police functions through joint locality boards.	Reduces service fragmentation, particularly around care leavers, mental health and community safety. Durham locality partnerships achieved measurable reductions in duplication and improved outcomes.

Figure 29: Key Public Sector Reform Opportunities for New Unitary Structure

Anticipated Benefits and Outcomes

Reorganisation into two unitary councils enables the new councils to redirect resources from centralised structures to the front line, strengthen strategic reform capacity and provide a platform for integrated, preventative services.

The two-unitary model will:

- **Reduce duplication and streamline governance:** Clear accountability avoids fragmented decision-making
- **Enable economies of scale:** Each unitary has sufficient scale to operate efficiently while remaining locally responsive, unlocking capacity for adult social care, children's services and preventative functions
- **Improve service quality and sustainability:** Integrated, neighbourhood-focused delivery supports prevention, early intervention and person-centred approaches, reducing demand at source and using resources effectively
- **Deliver better value for money:** Resources can be redirected from administrative overheads to front-line services. Optional collaboration or efficiency measures may be explored only where a clear business case exists, while each unitary retains full operational autonomy.

This approach identifies opportunities for joined-up, preventative services while strengthening local governance and system-wide integration, providing the scale and capacity to manage demand effectively and secure long-term value for money.

Required Conditions and Enablers

Successful implementation of a fully disaggregated two-unitary model depends on effective organisational leadership, culture, ownership, capacity and capability; all of which will underpin transformational public service reform and ensure each unitary can deliver neighbourhood-focused, preventative services while maintaining strategic coherence.

The key ingredients for transformational reform are set out in *Figure 30*.

Culture, leadership and accountability	A place-based commitment to person-centred reform and strong leadership are essential to drive the transition from legacy structures to locally accountable, place-based governance. Staffordshire currently benefits from an established collaborative culture. Embedding prevention, trust and collaboration across both unitary councils will ensure responsive decision-making and accountability at political and executive levels.
Data, systems and technology	Integrated, accessible data systems are essential. Existing initiatives such as One Public Estate provide tested platforms that can be expanded across both unitary councils to support preventative, person-centred and intelligence-driven services while maintaining secure governance.
Collaboration foundations	These foundations offer a model for scaling partnership working under the new unitary councils. By maintaining strong links with NHS Integrated Care Systems, Police and VCSE partners, the unitary councils can co-design services, reduce duplication and respond dynamically to local priorities, while preserving full disaggregation and autonomy. Proven joint delivery across Staffordshire Moorlands and High Peak demonstrates the capability of local organisations to work collaboratively across boundaries.
Workforce integration and capability development	Reform depends on workforce readiness, supported by joint training, shared development frameworks and cross-unitary learning. Workforce transformation will embed neighbourhood-focused skills and collaborative behaviours to support effective service delivery and integrated governance.
Aligned frameworks and commissioning	Each unitary will operate independently, retaining full commissioning autonomy. Alignment of strategic frameworks will only be pursued where clear, demonstrable benefits for residents exist, ensuring consistent service quality and equity across each new unitary council.

Figure 30: Key Ingredients for Transformational Reform in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

By focusing on culture, leadership, data, collaboration, workforce and aligned frameworks, the two-unitary model provides the conditions for transformational reform, enabling fully disaggregated, locally responsive and preventative services while maintaining strategic coherence, financial resilience and capacity for innovation.

The two-unitary model provides Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with a strategically coherent and locally responsive platform for transformational public service reform. By fully disaggregating services across North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire, local identity will be preserved while enabling integrated, preventative delivery across health, care, housing and community safety. Building on existing collaboration, digital integration and workforce initiatives, the councils have the leadership and capacity to embed a culture of prevention, trust and neighbourhood-focused decision-making.

This structure supports seamless, person-centred

services, improved local responsiveness, sustainable efficiencies and strengthened system-wide partnerships, establishing the strongest conditions for lasting, transformational change.

Criterion 4 – Working together to understand and meet local needs

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

- a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

Approach to Engagement

There are three necessary phases to the engagement with local stakeholders on local government reorganisation:

- **Phase 1** – Following the Government announcement on LGR in December 2024 and the subsequent invitation in February 2025, it was necessary for all the councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to develop awareness campaigns to inform residents about the process for the development of proposals and outline the implications for the responsibilities for future service delivery. It was also necessary to clarify the position in respect of Devolution.
- **Phase 2** - Engagement with stakeholders in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent on their priorities for local government reorganisation and the emerging proposals that are to be made by the principal councils in response to the invitation. This proposal recognises that it should be focused on the unitary structure for the whole of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and consequently has considered the engagement outcomes from the activities undertaken by all the local authorities in the area.
- **Phase 3** – Statutory consultation led by Government on final proposals received in November 2025 – this is the point at which residents and stakeholders have the opportunity to respond with an informed view when all the options are on the table.

Phase 1 – Awareness Campaigns

The awareness campaign has been active since December 2024, with all the Councils using media releases, website pages and social media channels to explain what devolution and local government reorganisation is about, and how they will impact residents.

The Local Government Association’s [Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation](#) hub has been signposted. The LGA also produced social media assets covering the topics below. These have been provided as video explainers and static messages and have been used by the Councils to support social media posts:

- What is the Devolution Priority Programme?
- What is local government reorganisation (LGR)?
- What’s the difference between devolution and LGR?
- What is a unitary authority?
- What is a combined authority?
- What is a strategic authority?
- What is a mayor?
- What is the role of mayors compared to council leaders?

Phase 2 – Engagement with Residents and Stakeholders on Priorities for Local Government Reorganisation and Emerging Proposals

Government expected that engagement would take place with the following groups:

- Member(s) of Parliament
- Local partners - NHS, Police and Fire, National Park Authorities, business groups, voluntary sector
- Residents
- Workforce and their representatives
- Business
- Town and Parish councils

As there were several separate submissions being developed across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, it was important to ensure shared stakeholders did not experience multiple and conflicting requests. Staffordshire Chief Executives Group recognised this and agreed, where possible, the Councils making the submissions would join up engagement plans.

The engagement activity with stakeholders across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is set out in **Figure 31**.

Staffordshire County Council	Series of 1:1 conversations with key stakeholders, working with representatives of the voluntary sector and parish councils to gather wider feedback from these groups
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Series of focus group conversations with key stakeholders, working with Cratus to finalise plans.
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Districts	Stakeholders mapped as ‘shared and local.’ Initial letter signalling intention to engage distributed. Engagement with shared stakeholders to be run jointly across the districts. Local stakeholders to be engaged by the relevant district/borough.
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Series of 1:1 conversations with stakeholder not covered by the main activity of the other councils e.g. the Peak National Park Authority and local community groups and business networks Meetings with Staffordshire Moorlands town and parish councils in locality clusters and included additional engagement with town and parish councils in the areas of the Stafford and East Staffordshire Boroughs which are impacted by the modification request

Figure 31: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Councils – LGR Engagement with Stakeholders

Agreement was reached on aligning the stakeholder engagement activity in the following way:

- For key stakeholders who are shared across councils, engagement sessions with each stakeholder took place face to face or online
- The logistics of shared stakeholder meetings were coordinated centrally
- For local stakeholders who are not shared across councils, engagement sessions were led by senior representatives of the relevant district/borough or city council
- Sessions were transcribed so that the feedback could be shared
- MP engagement was based on constituency boundaries, and each MP was offered the opportunity to meet with the relevant county/city council representative alongside the relevant district/borough council representative

The draft themes for exploration in engagement activity with stakeholders in the context of local government reorganisation were:

- **Current services:**
 - What works well now that should be retained?
 - What doesn't work well now that should be addressed through LGR?
- **Opportunities and challenges/risks:**
 - What are the biggest opportunities? Why?
 - What are the biggest challenges/risks? Why?
- **Community links:** How can fewer, bigger councils maintain strong connections with local communities?

- **Efficiency:** How can reorganisation help councils to deliver more efficient services?
- **Partnership working:** How could reorganisation affect the way local authorities work in partnership?

The engagement with residents across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent was developed by individual councils to support the development of their proposals and the engagement approaches undertaken were largely complementary. *Figure 32* summarises the engagement activity with residents. This activity has produced a rich understanding of the views of residents:

- With the county council focusing on qualitative insight and targeting recruitment to deliberative focus groups, and the city council and district and borough councils undertaking a combination of wider open-invite public engagement sessions and survey activity in the North and South of the county, there was limited risk of duplication
- Alignment of themes/questions resulted in a rich set of data covering the views of people across the whole county that could be combined

Staffordshire County Council	Series of eight deliberative focus groups (one in each district) led by market research agency (ORS). Attendees recruited to ensure they are demographically representative of Staffordshire's population. Let's Talk Staffordshire online survey was signposted reactively to those who wish to contribute but have not been part of the focus groups.
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Combination of engagement with residents at events in their communities and through online channels. Sought views of residents in Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme through Cratus as an independent organisation.
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Districts	Single residents survey for use across the partnership complemented by locally led public engagement sessions on a district-by-district basis.
Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council	Single Newcastle-under-Lyme residents survey specifically related to LGR
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	Incorporated specific questions in relation to LGR were added to the biennial Residents Survey Specific views of residents of the areas of Stafford Borough and East Staffordshire impacted by the modification request - conducted by Cratus to complement Stoke-on-Trent City Council's activity

Figure 32: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent - Engagement with Residents to Support LGR Proposals

Phase 2 – Engagement in Respect of the Modification Request

Once the preferred option for LGR emerged, the Council engaged with the other Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent to outline the proposed submission and the justification for the modification request. There was specific engagement with the local authorities directly impacted by the modification:

- Stoke-on-Trent City Council
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
- Stafford Borough Council
- East Staffordshire Borough Council

Specific engagement was undertaken with the Town and Parish councils in the areas of Stafford Borough and East Staffordshire that were impacted by the modification.

As this proposal involves a modification request with a different geography from the existing district and borough boundaries, there were specific requirements for engagement with residents in these areas. Supplementary engagement activity was commissioned from Cratus, targeted at the communities of Stone and Uttoxeter. This engagement complemented the ongoing engagement work being delivered on behalf of Stoke-on-Trent City Council, which covered Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme as part of the development of their proposal.

This enhanced engagement recognised the specific sensitivities and strategic importance of ensuring Stone and Uttoxeter residents were meaningfully included in engagement over their potential inclusion within a future North Staffordshire unitary authority rather than the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary authority.

Stone and Uttoxeter and their neighbouring communities, located on the geographic edge of the proposed North/Southern Staffordshire unitary split, require focused engagement to provide reassurance to residents:

- About their future - and include them in decision-making where possible
- Counter perceptions of being “on the fringe” or dominated by the areas, in particular, Stoke-on-Trent within a new North Staffordshire authority
- Allow them to identify place-based concerns and factors influencing public sentiment
- Ensure their inclusion, clarity, and community voice in shaping the future authority

The objectives of this specific engagement were to:

- Gauge identity and belonging: Understand how residents of Stone and Uttoxeter feel about the idea of a North Staffordshire authority
- Test and localise messaging: Refine messaging to resonate with the semi-rural market town communities
- Elevate local voices: Identify local champions and trusted figures to act as advocates for this proposal, which differs slightly from the base proposal for a North Staffordshire unitary by including these communities
- Provide evidence: Gather data and feedback to support the overall submission

Engagement with the Workforce

The impact of local government reorganisation on the workforce of the Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is significant. Good levels of engagement on the emerging proposals have been essential.

In Staffordshire Moorlands, there have been regular in person briefings led by the Chief Executive to all levels of the organisation alongside regular updates in the monthly Team Talk staff newsletter since December 2024 when the White Paper was published. Staff representatives have also been kept up to date. Inevitably, there are various questions staff have about the process, timescales and, understandably, their own futures. A set of FAQs has been developed and shared with the workforce. Similar approaches have been followed across all the councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

Engagement with Local Councillors

Local Councillors have played a key role during the awareness campaign, stakeholder engagement phase and consultation phase, by sharing social media posts the Councils publish, across their own and group social media accounts.

All Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have ensured that members have been kept informed as the process develops, through political group meetings and briefings at key points.

In Staffordshire Moorlands, there has been a particular focus on ensuring that a process is put in place to ensure that individual localities are adequately recognised in the new unitary councils that are implemented in line with the Secretary of State's decision following consideration of the proposals that are made in November 2025.

Consultation with Town and Parish Councils

Over the last two years, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has prioritised strengthening the relationships with the Town and Parish councils in the district. The scope of this work is now being extended to ensure that the towns and parishes are equipped for future models that may be adopted by a new unitary council.

The Council has engaged with all Town and Parish councils (in clusters based on the localities identified in the Staffordshire Moorlands), firstly to outline the LGR process, and the emerging proposals including the Council's preferred option, but more importantly to discuss the impact on localities of the unitary local government structure on a wider geography.

Similar engagement has taken place in the other areas of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

It is recognised that Town and Parish councils will not be part of the formal governance arrangements of the unitary councils but will need to play a vital role in neighbourhood working, particularly in rural geographies.

Phase 3 – Consultation led by Government on the Final Proposals Received

The provisions in the Local Government and Public Involvement Health Act 2007 require that, before a proposal for reorganisation can be implemented, the Secretary of State must first consult any local authority that is affected by a proposal (but which has not submitted it), and any such other persons considered appropriate.

Government intends to consult on proposals for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent between January 2026 and April 2026. The consultation will invite views on the proposals that have been made by the local authorities in response to the invitation.

Local authorities (principal ones in the area, as well as neighbouring principal ones), local public services, local business, local voluntary sector, local education (universities), other local bodies and national bodies, will all be consulted.

Residents in affected areas will be invited to submit their views, and the Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will have a responsibility to promote this statutory consultation. [The Statutory Consultation for LGR in Surrey](#) was undertaken between 17th June 2025 and 5th August 2025. This confirmed the approach that will be followed in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and the other areas subject to local government reorganisation.

Outcomes from Engagement with Stakeholders

Stakeholder interviews were undertaken with:

- Staffordshire Integrated Care Board
- Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals North Midlands
- Birmingham Chambers of Commerce
- Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Keele University
- Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group
- South Staffordshire College
- Stoke-on-Trent City College
- Staffordshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
- Staffordshire Police
- Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service
- 5 of the 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)

Several key issues emerged from the stakeholder engagement:

- **Devolution** - Stakeholders highlighted the significant benefits that devolution could bring to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent
- **Local Identity** - There were concerns about the loss of local identity and that the new unitary authorities risk becoming remote with less representation
- **Financial Sustainability** - Stakeholders accepted that LGR was an opportunity to generate financial savings and improve the financial sustainability of local government, but were unconvinced about the level of savings achievable given the scale of the challenge
- **Partnership Working** - Many stakeholders highlighted the opportunities to strengthen partnership working in the long-term
- **Service Improvement** - Stakeholders recognise that the two-tier system can be confusing, and simplified structures would make it easier for residents to access services
- **Disruption** - There were concerns about the level of disruption that will be associated with LGR: stakeholders raised concerns over the disruption that LGR will cause including the need to reconfigure partnership relationships

Outcomes from Engagement with Residents

Outcomes from Focus Groups

A number of key issues were raised in the focus groups with residents:

- **Loss of local identity** - there was a significant concern that the proposed larger or councils' risk being disconnected from local communities, and how this would impact on responsiveness
- **Community Engagement** - the ongoing need for engagement throughout the change process was requested. The need for transparency in communications and meaningful consultation was identified as essential for building trust and ensuring a successful transition
- **Efficiency savings** - residents recognised the potential for improvements in service delivery by consolidating the existing two tiers of local government. The potential for efficiency savings was also acknowledged but there was scepticism about whether these benefits would be realised
- **Continuity of service delivery** - there were concerns about the potential disruption during transition and the need to ensure that essential services will not be impacted was stressed
- **Concerns about local authorities merging with Stoke-on-Trent City Council** - There was opposition to merging Stoke-on-Trent City Council from residents in their neighbouring authorities. This was driven by concerns about financial sustainability, given the financial challenges in Stoke-on-Trent. There were also concerns about the distinct needs of different communities outside the city, with fears that rural areas could be neglected due to

the complex challenges that will need to be tackled

Outcomes from Resident Surveys

Table 22 summarises the LGR related residents' surveys that have been conducted and the level of response.

Local Authority	Target Population	Level of Response	Responses as % of Target Population
			%
Staffordshire Moorlands	95,800	833	0.9
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Councils: Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, South Staffordshire, Stafford, Tamworth	656,800	16,756	2.6
Newcastle-under-Lyme	123,300	1,380	1.1

Table 22: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent: Summary the LGR related residents' surveys and the Level of Response

The detailed findings from the Staffordshire Moorlands survey are attached in **Appendix D**. The high-level summaries of findings from the other two residents' surveys are provided based on the published outcomes.

The outcomes from the residents' survey were:

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Residents' Survey

Highest level of support for the following future priorities for local government:

- **High-quality local services (e.g. waste collection, adult care, road maintenance)**
- **Local decision-making and accountability**
- **Keeping council tax as low as possible**
- **Protecting and promoting local identity and heritage**

The main concerns about local government reorganisation included:

- **Opposition to a new unitary Council including Stoke-on-Trent** – the responses indicated a distrust of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's financial management and concerns about absorbing Stoke-on-Trent's debt and perceived poor services, along with fears of losing local identity and autonomy
- **The need to retain rural identity and services** – residents expressed pride in the rural nature of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its market towns and community spirit. There were concerns about being overshadowed by urban priorities
- **Desire to maintain local governance and decision-making** – there was a desire for decisions made by elected representatives who live locally and understand and will represent their communities
- **Concerns about future finances and resource allocation** – there was anxiety that council tax would be used to meet challenges in other areas and there would be a loss of funding for local services and a lack of financial transparency

- **Insignificance of the consultation process**
– there were concerns that the process is predetermined, and engagement is tokenistic, with voices not genuinely being considered
- **Calls for improved services and infrastructure**
– outcomes stressed the need for better transport, healthcare, youth services, and policing. There was also a desire for more investment in local towns

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council Residents' Survey

The top four priorities for a new unitary council were:

- **Keeping services that are based on local need**
- **Having local councillors who are close to local issues**
- **Saving money while keeping local services running smoothly**
- **Keeping what makes our area special**

Residents identified the top four most important themes to how services are delivered as:

- **Improved infrastructure (roads, health and schools)**
- **Able to change to fit what local people need**
- **Value for money**
- **Delivered locally**

It was also important to note that it was reported that **76% of residents were very concerned about local government reorganisation** as opposed to 6% who were very confident that the new unitary councils could continue to provide good public services that last and meet their needs. As with the Staffordshire Moorlands survey there was a

significant number of **concerns and opposition to merging with Stoke-on-Trent.**

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Councils Residents' Survey

The top priorities for a new unitary council were:

- **Keeping services that are based on local needs**
- **Having local councillors that listen to residents**
- **Able to change to fit what local people need**
- **Working better and faster**

When asked 'what is most important in how services are delivered in a new council' the highest level of support was for:

- **Improved infrastructure (roads, health, and schools)**
- **Value for money**
- **Able to change to fit what local people need**
- **Working better and faster**

The biggest concerns raised by respondents concerning local government reorganisation were reported as:

- **Loss of local identity/representation** - there were concerns that new unitary councils would be more distant from residents and local voices and community character would be lost
- **Services becoming remote or less responsive**
– there were concerns that essential local services would be more difficult to access and less tailored to local needs

- **Bureaucracy/lack of accountability** – there were concerns that larger unitary councils would result in higher levels of bureaucracy and slower decision making. There was also scepticism on whether savings would truly be passed on to residents.

‘No to Stoke’ Petition

At the start of 2025, local Conservative Party representatives in both Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme launched a ‘No to Stoke’ petition which was a campaign to oppose the proposed local government reorganisation and the potential merging of the two areas into a North Staffordshire unitary council, including the city of Stoke-on-Trent.

The campaign has comprised multiple street stalls, attendance at public events, setting up a petition, the delivery of petition leaflets to households, media relations activity, and direct engagement with local residents.

The Staffordshire Moorlands ‘No to Stoke’ petition was presented to the Full Council meeting in September 2025. The petition contained **8,508** signatures (including 8,321 residents from the Staffordshire Moorlands).

It is understood that in Newcastle-under-Lyme the petition has generated **8,700** signatures.

Outcomes from Engagement on Proposed Boundary Modification

Engagement with Residents in Areas Subject to the Boundary Modification

Supplementary engagement activity was commissioned from Cratus targeted at the communities of Stone and Uttoxeter, the two main communities in the area proposed to a boundary change. The engagement gathered views from residents, businesses, and community groups in and around Stone and Uttoxeter. The programme combined an online public survey, alongside high-footfall pop-up events with survey completion, and targeted stakeholder outreach.

The full outcomes are set out in the feedback report, which is attached as part of **Appendix D**.

A total of 461 survey responses were received, including 84 completed in person at events, which directly engaged more than 100 residents. Responses were drawn predominantly from ST14 (Uttoxeter area) and ST15 (Stone area) postcodes, demonstrating that feedback was locally grounded and representative of residents in and around the towns of Uttoxeter and Stone. Communications sought to reach a broad cross-section of local organisations, businesses, schools, healthcare providers and community groups, ensuring that awareness of the consultation and its purpose was widespread.

The engagement sought to understand:

- **How people identify with Uttoxeter and Stone and their sense of place**
- **Residents' experiences of current local government and public services**
- **Patterns of travel, work, and access to amenities across both towns**
- **Priorities and preferences for any future local government arrangements**

Findings demonstrated a strong sense of local identity and pride in both towns. Residents consistently described Uttoxeter and Stone as friendly, community-minded market towns with good local amenities and distinctive characters. There was also a clear preference for retaining local control and accountability, with many expressing their preference for their town to form part of a new, similarly sized, locally focused council that would reflect the character of their community.

Key priorities for the new unitary councils identified through the survey included:

- **Better transport links**
- **Greater local decision-making**
- **High-quality local services and protecting local identity**
- **Growing the local economy**
- **Keeping council tax low**

Respondents placed a strong emphasis on practical improvements such as better roads, access to GPs, and more effective infrastructure planning to keep pace with housing growth. Economic issues also featured prominently, with many residents calling for renewed investment in high streets, support for small and independent businesses, and action to manage town centre decline.

Views on local government reorganisation were mixed:

- Some residents saw **potential benefits in simplifying council structures and reducing duplication of effort**, provided that local voices are maintained and efficiency gains are clear
- Others expressed **concern about losing local accountability, higher costs, or decisions being taken further away from the communities they affect**
- Neutral and procedural comments highlighted **the need for any future model to be properly tested, transparent, and locally informed** before implementation

Overall, the consultation showed a preference for a locally aligned “specific split” arrangement, either both towns would join with North Staffordshire, or one where Stone would remain within a Western or Southern area and Uttoxeter within an Eastern or Southern-Mid Staffordshire grouping.

These options reflect strong support for maintaining existing community and geographic links while avoiding alignment with larger, more distant authorities. Although, some respondents expressed uncertainty or supported alternative models.

Overall, residents expressed a shared desire for local government that is **responsive, transparent, and centred on community priorities**. While some recognise the potential advantages of reorganisation, most believe that any **future model must preserve local decision-making, ensure fair funding, and maintain the distinct identities of towns such as Uttoxeter and Stone**.

Engagement with Town and Parish Councils in Areas Subject to the Boundary Modification

Specific engagement took place with Uttoxeter Town Council and Stone Town Council to outline the proposal that was intended to be submitted.

Uttoxeter Town Council – Staffordshire Moorlands District Council was invited to meet with representatives of the town council and had the opportunity to outline the basis of the proposed submission, including the request for modification of the boundaries. The proposal was well received, and a further meeting took place that included several of the neighbouring parish councils in the wider area. This wider engagement was much appreciated. Following consideration of the proposal, Uttoxeter Town Council provided a letter of support for the Modified Proposal (attached in **Appendix D**). The reasons for the support were set out as:

- Uttoxeter would be best placed to influence the development of the A50 Growth Corridor
- The town has broadly common interests with neighbouring market towns
- The town shares common stronger economic interests with the North of the county
- It would more reflect the dominant travel patterns of residents for work, retail and entertainment

Stone Town Council – the engagement with Stone Town Council was less productive. The town council strongly favours the split into two unitary authorities, South and North, with Stone included within the South. It also stated that the East/West proposal also offers many of the advantages of the town council's preferred option but would only be supported should the North/South option prove to be unviable. The town council is currently opposed to the North/South split, with Stone in the North as included in the Modified Proposal.

Engagement with Existing Principal Local Authorities with Areas Impacted by the Modification

The constructive dialogue between the principal local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has continued since the February 2025 invitation and throughout the period when proposals have been developed. The different perspectives and positions are accepted and respected by all. The position of the local authorities who will form part of the North Staffordshire Unitary Council in the Modified Proposal is:

Stoke-on-Trent City Council – preference is the Base Proposal, but should the Modified Proposal be accepted, they have no objections in principle

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council – is not prepared to consider any proposal that results with Newcastle in a unitary council alongside the city of Stoke-on-Trent as they are keen to preserve the identity of the Borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme

East Staffordshire – were prepared to consider a boundary modification early in the process, but they have since confirmed that they will not support the Modified Proposal

Stafford Borough Council – have been clear that they do not want to see the Borough split in reorganisation.

Summary of Engagement Outcomes and Issues to be Addressed during Implementation

The engagement has demonstrated that there are six key priorities for the development of the structure of unitary local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. These are illustrated in *Figure 33*.

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Priorities for the Future Unitary Structure of Local Government	
High quality services that reflect local needs	Value for money
Protecting local identity	Responsiveness/ability to adapt to local circumstances
Local decision making and accountability	Improved services and infrastructure

Figure 33: Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent - Stakeholder and Residents' Priorities for Unitary Local Government

These priorities have been embedded in the Proposal as follows:

- They have been reflected in the vision and design principles
- The significant opportunities for the improvement of services, the realisation of efficiency savings and improvements in financial sustainability are clearly evidenced in the proposal
- One of the key drivers for the boundary modification request is to acknowledge the unique local identities that recognise the social and economic connections of residents
- The proposals for neighbourhood governance will ensure that there is ongoing development of services around local needs and challenges and there is local accountability
- The economies of scale offered by the new

unitary councils will provide the capacity to improve responsiveness

The Proposal recognises the four significant opportunities for local government reorganisation identified by stakeholders and residents during the engagement process:

- **Devolution** – the significant benefits that devolution could bring to Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is recognised across the area – the proposal sets out a ‘blueprint’ for unlocking devolution, including proposals for collaboration between the two new unitary councils to facilitate the creation of a new Strategic Authority
- **Generating Efficiency Savings and Financial Sustainability** – the proposal identifies the significant financial benefits of reorganisation and its impact on ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. The proposed boundary modification provides for an even share of the benefits across the two new councils and secures a stronger tax base for the North Staffordshire unitary, without detriment to the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary, to mitigate the specific challenges relating to Stoke-on-Trent’s significant cost pressures.
- **Simplifying Structures and Service Improvements** – the process of transformation will provide the platform to redesign services and realise the significant service improvements set out in the proposal. This will have a significant positive impact on outcomes for residents.
- **Strengthening Partnerships** – the move away from the two-tier structure will result in less complex and more streamlined strategic partnership arrangements. This will provide a platform for delivering the wider public service reform opportunities identified in the proposal.

Despite the extensive engagement across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, there remains a significant number of concerns:

- **Loss of local identity** due to the geographical coverage of the new unitary councils
- **Disruption and continuity of service delivery** during the transition
- **Financial sustainability** and resource allocation
- **Loss of local representation** and accountability
- **Retention of rural identity and services** due to the demands from urban areas

The proposal sets out a level of assurance in addressing these concerns; however, there is still a lack of understanding about the process for local government reorganisation and confidence in its success. This has been exacerbated by the emergence of a significant number of proposals in response to the invitation from the Secretary of State and the competitive process that has followed.

There will be a need for ongoing community engagement and consultation all the way through to implementation in March 2028 and beyond to give assurance that these concerns will be addressed. There will be a specific requirement for an effective communications campaign, post proposal submission, in respect of the following:

- Ensure that the additional benefits of the requested boundary modification in this proposal are more clearly understood and widely accepted
- Assurances about Stoke-on-Trent's financial position to counter the perceptions of residents that it will be significantly detrimental to the financial sustainability of the North Staffordshire Unitary

Civic and Ceremonial Arrangements

Stoke-on-Trent's history is defined by its formation as a federation of six towns - Burslem, Fenton, Hanley, Longton, Stoke-upon-Trent, and Tunstall. The six towns grew from small villages into industrial centres. In 1910, to leverage the thriving pottery industry, the county borough of Stoke-on-Trent was formed by federating the six towns. The new borough was granted its coat of arms in 1912, which combined symbols from the original six towns. In 1925, the borough was elevated to city status, a decision personally announced by King George V. The city's motto, "Vis unita fortior" ("Strength united is stronger"), reflects the federation of the six towns. The city is currently celebrating its centenary which has been acknowledged with a great deal of pride by its communities.

Preserving the unique historical identities of this historically rich civic office is important for North Staffordshire and the wider region. Accordingly, it is proposed that the city explores the establishment of Charter Trustee status to ensure the continuation of the civic, historic and ceremonial traditions for Stoke-on-Trent in the new North Staffordshire Unitary Council. The Charter Trustees will be a non-political and non-statutory body with the primary objective being to maintain and promote the historic and ceremonial traditions for the historic settlement.

Charter Trustees existed for the City of Lichfield when they were established in 1974 to maintain the civic and ceremonial traditions of the former city council after its abolition, but they no longer exist. They were replaced in 1980 by the new Lichfield City Council (a parish council) after the area became a civil parish and city status was restored.

Consideration should also be given to preserving the ancient borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme which established in the 12th century. It is known to have been granted a charter around 1173 by Henry II although the earliest surviving charter dates from 1235. The borough was formally incorporated in 1590 under a new charter from Elizabeth I.

There are also many market, fair and agricultural fair charters across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, which are important to the areas' distinct identity, culture and economy. They will need to be preserved and celebrated. These charters have been identified and should be included in the consequential Parliamentary Orders to ensure these important traditions continue to enrich the areas' communities for many years to come.

Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, there are a significant number of honorary Aldermen and Burgesses. These acknowledgements date back centuries. The position of alderman with additional voting rights has been abolished outside the City of London since the Local Government Act 1972. The title of alderman has become a purely honorary title that a principal council can confer on former council members who have rendered "eminent service" to the council. This practice has continued across Staffordshire with many individuals and organisations being recognised in this way. When the predecessor councils are formally abolished during reorganisation, any person who held the title of honorary alderman immediately beforehand will automatically become an honorary alderman of the successor council.

Staffordshire County Council acts as the secretariat for the Staffordshire Lord-Lieutenant's Office. In England and Wales, His Majesty the King appoints the Lord-Lieutenant for each County (or Metropolitan area) on the advice of the Prime Minister, who consults widely in the County concerned. The fundamental principle concerning the office is that he or she is His Majesty's representative and consequently it is his or her first and foremost duty to uphold the dignity of the Crown. The responsibilities for the continuation of providing support to this important function will need to be allocated to one of the unitary councils.

Criterion 5 – Supporting future devolution arrangements

New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one; how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.**
- b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.**
- c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.**

Unlocking Devolution

It is essential that any future reconfiguration of unitary councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent unlocks future devolution to a strategic authority in the area.

The councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent recognise the benefits of devolution through devolved powers and funding and have confirmed a preferred option of a Strategic Authority based on the existing geography of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.

The Leaders of all the Councils in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent submitted an expression of interest for devolution in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in September 2024 in response to an invitation by the Deputy Prime Minister in July 2024 to areas without a current devolution settlement

This expression of interest set out how the Councils proposed to work together with neighbouring authorities to take on devolved powers. The expression of interest also set out Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's devolution "opportunities, asks and benefits" under five main themes:

- Economic Development
- Skills
- Energy and Environment
- Transport
- Housing and Regeneration

Following publication of the Devolution White Paper, including the revised Devolution Framework, Staffordshire Leaders have confirmed their preference for devolution in the area:

- Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent should be the geography for the Strategic Authority – despite the population being under the desired 1.5 million, the area will align with other public services such as police, fire and rescue and health. It was also noted that there was little opportunity, at that stage, to work with neighbouring authorities as they were either part of or pursuing alternative arrangements for devolution, or in the case of Shropshire, there is little economic and social connectivity between the counties.
- The Leaders now wished to explore the Mayoral Strategic Authority option, despite the being contrary to the position that was set out in the expression of interest submitted to Government in September 2024. It was noted that the additional powers, funding and flexibility for this model as set out in the White Paper were sufficiently significant to justify the change in position. It was also noted that it is the Government's intention that this is the direction of travel for all strategic authorities and the Foundation Strategic Authority (without an elected mayor) is intended to be a 'stepping stone' to this.
- It was noted that a one unitary option would not be appropriate as a Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Strategic Authority would be required to cover more than one constituent local authority
- The specific preference for the Strategic Authority to be across the existing Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent geography (noting clear alignment across wider public sector boundaries) was confirmed, although it was acknowledged that this may require some flexibility, including consideration of any potential Government feedback on the

appropriate Mayoral Strategic Authority geography. The Leaders acknowledged that further key stakeholder consultation will be required around the devolution direction (for example, with the PCFC/ ICB).

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is not part of the Government's Devolution Priority Programme and, given the link between devolution and local government set out in the English Devolution white paper, devolution in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is likely to follow local government reorganisation. The councils are however open to early discussions with the Government on the timescales for the consideration of a Strategic Authority for the area. Despite the differing views of the future configuration of the unitary local authorities in Staffordshire, the Councils are unified in their view that without devolution the area is 'being left behind' when compared to neighbouring areas with strategic authorities in place.

Devolution in a Staffordshire Context

Establishing a single tier of local government in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent is an essential step towards devolution. Despite not being named within the government's current Devolution Priority Programme, the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Interim LGR Plan (February 2025) identifies an early preference for the establishment of a Mayoral Strategic Authority as set out above.

Establishing new unitary councils in North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire represents the optimum model to accelerate the unlocking of devolution and realisation of the transformational benefits currently being experienced by close neighbours in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and East Midlands.

The two unitary model would support devolution by balancing ambitious regional collaboration with meaningful localised place leadership:

- Both proposed new unitary councils possess

the scale and capacity/capabilities to inform and deliver regional priorities, while at the same time maintaining their close links to communities and local businesses

- Both new unitary councils represent sensible and currently recognised economic areas, with the distinct identities of residents and communities across North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire recognised and respected by the boundaries of each new unitary council
- Collectively, the new unitary councils hold coterminous boundaries with Staffordshire Police, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board, ensuring that both new unitary councils would be well placed to collaborate with system partners and the strategic authority to transform public services

Ultimately, the new unitary councils of North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire would be similarly sized constituent members of the strategic authority who share many of the same priorities, while at the same time operating as place leaders within their respective boundaries.

It is recognised that the move to a unitary structure will provide a less complex pathway to the establishment of the new Strategic Authority. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Strategic Alliance partner High Peak Borough Council was involved in the establishment of the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) as a non-constituent member and the complexities of the four upper-tier constituent authorities engaging and including the 19 district and borough councils in the process was evident. The unitary model provides for streamlined and coherent governance and accountability for devolution with appropriate representation and local democracy.

Balanced Approach to Devolution

The creation of two new unitary councils would establish councils with a population of 536,204 (North Staffordshire) and 598,305 (Southern and Mid-Staffordshire). Given their similar sizes, both new unitary councils would be well placed to:

- In conjunction with the strategic authority, maintain a focus on the systemic challenges (transport and connectivity, productivity, housing, skills) that currently impact the regional economy, local communities and businesses and lay the foundations for the Strategic Authority's Local Growth Plan
- Collaborate to support the region's cornerstone and emerging industries and key growth sectors, while also providing strong links between each place's economy and the development/delivery of regional economic priorities via the strategic authority. With similar sized populations and tax bases, each new unitary council would possess the economic assets and strength to deliver regional priorities
- Enabling public service system partners (health, PCC and police, fire and rescue etc.) to continue operating across the region without being required to reconfigure organisational/ service structures to align to new regional boundaries
- Represent and advocate for a collective population of c1.1 million residents. This scale would provide the strategic authority with the ability to influence national conversations, increase the region's (collective) bargaining power and assist in strategic planning and delivery across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Regional Approach to Addressing Challenges and Maximising Opportunities

Through the implementation of a North Staffordshire and a Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary model, the strategic authority would be well placed to deliver effective regional planning while at the same time empowering local delivery and accountability.

Collectively, the two new unitary councils and strategic authority would focus on priorities that address both regional and local challenges, namely:

- Economic growth and productivity, through both local and regional approaches to economic development designed to increase productivity and innovation, improve infrastructure and attract sustained external investment
- Investment in infrastructure, improving transportation networks and infrastructure to enhance connectivity and support growth
- Investing in the local authorities' workforce, by strengthening alignment between businesses, skills and education and health services
- Joint approaches to housing development and the transformation of public services, creating the conditions for population growth and improved outcomes/reduced levels of inequality
- Investment in local capacity and capability through a new approach to community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment, resulting in increased levels of social and economic resilience

Design of the Unitary Councils with a Readiness for Devolution

The preparation for devolution in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, and the subsequent creation of a new Strategic Authority, needs to be recognised in the design of the new unitary councils. This will ensure that there is structured regional strategic planning with strong local delivery, which will result in economic resilience for the area as a whole.

Figure 34 illustrates the potential future roles of the Strategic Authority and the new unitary councils in respect of the main economic functions.

Function	Strategic Authority Role	Unitary Council Role
Growth	- Regional Strategy - Spatial Vision - Funding Allocation	- Local Delivery - Place Based Regeneration Planning
Transport	- Regional Network Planning - Major Infrastructure - Public Transport	- Local Schemes - Active Travel - Highways
Skills	- Regional Skills Strategy - Funding Allocation	- Local Education Partnerships - Workforce Development
Housing	- Strategy Housing Targets - Investment Funding	- Local Plans - Delivery of Housing and Infrastructure
Business Support	- Inward Investment - Innovation Excellence	Local Enterprise Support
Inward Investment	- Regional Promotion - Sector Strategy	- Local Site Development - Investor Engagement

Figure 34: Potential future roles of the Strategic Authority and the Unitary Councils

Opportunity to Collaborate with Other Strategic Authorities

Given Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent neighbour several other existing strategic authorities (West Midlands, East Midlands and Greater Manchester, in addition to Cheshire from 2027), significant opportunities exist for collaboration with other regions.

Sections of the population and economy within the new North Staffordshire authority would possess strong ties to both Cheshire and Manchester, while Southern and Mid- Staffordshire would hold strong connections to the West Midlands. The eastern areas of both new unitary councils would hold strong relationships with the East Midlands.

Each of these connections provides a platform for collaboration across strategic authority boundaries. As demonstrated by collaboration between the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and Liverpool City Region (transport infrastructure including rail connectivity), West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire Combined Authorities (transport, housing and inclusive growth), the emerging Peak Partnership initiated by the mayors of Greater Manchester, South Yorkshire and the East Midlands, and North of Tyne and Tees Valley Combined Authorities (economic development, green energy, digital infrastructure), significant scope exists for collaboration across strategic authorities to maximise the opportunities created by devolution.

Criterion 6 – Stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment

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

- a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.
- b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

Democratic Representation

In accordance with the Guidance provided by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on council size submissions, consideration has been given as to the appropriate size in terms of elected membership for the proposed new unitary councils and the potential (recognising that this will be a matter for the shadow unitary councils) warding arrangements for their election.

The proposals for membership of the new Councils have considered the key issues considered by the Commission when carrying out any review of a proposed or existing Council. The Commission specifically seeks to understand elected member requirements across three aspects:

- **Strategic Leadership** – how many councillors are needed to give strategic leadership and direction to the authority?
- **Accountability**
 - Scrutiny – how many councillors are needed to provide scrutiny to the authority?
 - Regulatory – how many councillors are needed to meet the regulatory requirements of the authority?
 - Partnerships – how many councillors are required to manage partnerships between the local authority and other organisations?
- **Community Leadership** – how the representational role of councillors in the local community is discharged and how they engage with people and conduct casework

Following determination of the appropriate size of each of the new Councils' membership, consideration has been given to the pattern of wards for the new Councils, considering the Commission's three main criteria in respect of the same as follows:

- The new pattern of wards should mean that each councillor represents roughly the same number of voters as elected members elsewhere in the authority
- Ward patterns should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities and boundaries should be identifiable
- The electoral arrangements should promote effective and convenient local government and reflect the electoral cycle of the council

It should be noted that many of the key decisions as to the governance of the new Councils will need to be taken after their creation, which makes detailed consideration of each aspect difficult at this stage, however, a high-level consideration of each is outlined below.

Local Authority Profiles

North Staffordshire Council - The new North Staffordshire Council will comprise the electorate contained within the current Council areas of: Staffordshire Moorlands District Council; Stoke on Trent City Council; Newcastle under Lyme Borough Council; part of Stafford Borough Council; and part of East Staffordshire Borough Council. Its current total population is 536,172, spanning an area of 880 km².

On current boundaries, the Council has 91 city/district council wards and 20 County Electoral Divisions, and 183 Principal Authority members.

The Council will be characterised by a mix of urban (including city) and rural areas, with distinct identities and communities, with the following main towns, situated in both the current City Council and districts areas:

- Leek
- Cheadle
- Biddulph
- Burslem
- Tunstall
- Hanley
- Stoke
- Fenton
- Longton
- Newcastle under Lyme
- Kidsgrove
- Stone
- Uttoxeter

In terms of parish and town councils, all the Staffordshire Moorlands, Uttoxeter and Stone areas are fully parished. The Newcastle under Lyme Borough area is parished save for Newcastle Town centre. There are no parish or town councils in the Stoke on Trent City area.

Southern and Mid Staffordshire Council - The new Southern and Mid Staffordshire Council will comprise the electorate contained within the current Council areas of: East Staffordshire Borough Council (part); Cannock Chase District Council; Lichfield District Council; South Staffordshire District Council; Stafford Borough Council (part); and Tamworth Borough Council. Its current total population is 598,128 and it will span an area of 1,833 km².

On current boundaries, the Council has 136 district council wards and 42 County Electoral Divisions, and 254 Principal Authority members.

The Council will also be characterised by a mix of urban and rural areas, with the following main towns:

- Burton Upon Trent
- Lichfield
- Burntwood
- Tamworth
- Stafford
- Eccleshall
- Cannock
- Hednesford
- Rugeley
- Codsall
- Penkridge

In terms of Parish and Town councils, all the Lichfield, East Staffordshire Borough and South Staffordshire areas are fully parished. Stafford Borough is parished save for the Stafford town area and Cannock Chase District Council save for parts of Cannock town. There are no parish or town councils in the Tamworth Borough area.

Demographic Make-up

The varied demographic make-up of the new Councils, summarised in **Appendix A**, demonstrates the diverse nature of the Councils' population, in terms of ethnicity, age, health and socio-economic status. This diversity is likely to place pressure on the requirements of members, in terms of their engagement within the Councils' formal governance structure and in their community leadership role.

Strategic Leadership

The new Councils will operate under the 'Strong Leader with Cabinet' model in line with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holders, a total of up to 10 positions, will be very significant roles within each Council's governance structure.

The Leader of each Council will be elected for up to a four-year term of office at the first Annual Council meetings in May. Under the strong leader arrangements, the Leader of the Council determines the makeup of the Cabinet and may also hold a Portfolio.

The Leader and Portfolio Holders will be responsible both collectively and individually under delegated powers for all executive decision making within the Councils. These responsibilities will be significant, both during the period before vesting of the new Councils and afterwards, to ensure appropriate decision-making arrangements are in place to ensure compliance with all the legal duties of the

new Councils. The Leader and all Portfolio Holders will be required to make a substantial time commitment to properly carry out their roles, with both formal obligations under the new Councils' constitutions and informal meetings to ensure the development of the Councils' policies, in partnership with the Councils' officers.

The Full Council of the new authorities will be responsible for all non-executive functions of the Councils, not otherwise delegated to committees or officers. This will include the approval of the Council budget each year and the adoption of the Council's new Local Plan, which will require the engagement of all elected members in its development. The Full Council will also approve the Council's constitution, agreeing, with the executive, appropriate arrangements for discharge of all Council functions, including the delegations to officers and committees.

Accountability

Scrutiny - The new Councils' scrutiny arrangements will require significant member input to ensure that the effective oversight and support in the development of the new Councils' extensive functions are undertaken. The Councils will need to establish several Scrutiny Committees to fulfil this duty, producing reports and recommendations to their respective Cabinet and the Council on proposed new policies and the development of services. These functions will be particularly onerous during the early days of the new Councils and will require sufficient elected members to operate effectively.

The Scrutiny Committees will also monitor decisions made under the Councils' executive arrangements. Additionally, the Scrutiny Committees will monitor all aspects of the performance of the new Councils' services, as well as the service and performance of external organisations and stakeholders.

Further, service delivery has changed over time, with the creation of council-controlled companies providing services to council residents. The oversight of these companies by councillors, both executive

and non-executive, will be essential to ensuring appropriate governance for their activities.

Regulatory Functions - The new Councils will have extensive regulatory functions requiring significant member engagement involving, as a minimum, functions relating to planning, licensing, governance, standards and audit.

Planning determination across both Council areas will, in addition to delegation to officers, require a dedicated Committee at each, with the possibility of sub-Committees to represent the varied communities affected by applications. Additionally, extensive member engagement will be required in the Local Plan development process considering the mix of land use issues across the Councils' areas, with all members responsible for adoption of the prepared Plan.

The Councils will each be required to establish a Licensing Committee, made up of up to 15 councillors to develop and review the policies of the Council relating to licensing and regulatory functions and to determine a wide variety of licence applications. The Committee will also be likely to have responsibility for other non-executive functions, including taxi licensing, street trading licences and the conduct of elections. Additionally, the Councils will need to appoint Licensing Sub-Committees to consider premises licences, club premises certificates, temporary events notices and personal licences related to the sale and/or supply of alcohol and the provision of regulated entertainment and late-night refreshment where representations have been made. The level of licensing activity in the Councils' areas is likely to be significant given the level of activity in the night-time economy, particularly in the larger towns.

The new Councils' Standards and Audit committees will provide important member oversight of each Council's legislative obligations in these crucial areas to ensure effective governance arrangements are in place. Adopting best practice recommendations from CIPFA and elsewhere, the Committees will likely also include independent members and potentially members representing parish councils within the Councils' areas.

Partnerships

Councillors in the new Councils will be appointed as the Councils' representatives on a range of different local, regional and national external organisations. Each municipal year, the Councils (or executive) will make appointments or nominations to several external organisations, joint committees, panels, groups and partnerships. A number of these bodies will be decision-making and /or have strategic significance.

For context in terms of the number of members likely to be engaged in outside bodies, the County Council currently makes appointments to over 100 outside bodies and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council appoints 94 councillors to 45 different organisations.

The new Councils are also likely to establish formal joint arrangements with their public sector partners around matters relating to health, policing and fire safety. Additionally, the Councils will be partners in the Strategic Authority established under the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill following enactment.

Community Leadership

As noted above, the diverse nature of the new Councils will create significant work at a ward level for elected members. Councillors will be supported by officers to develop effective arrangements for the carrying out of their ward work, including the use of an appropriate case management system, but are likely to undertake the following ward-based activities:

- Ward surgeries
- Ward walks
- Newsletters
- Social media activity (Facebook, X)
- Participate in local community groups

In parished areas in both new Councils, members will engage as part of their community leadership role, which is likely to be a significant commitment in these areas, given the number of parish councils within each new Council ward area, particularly in the rural areas.

The new Councils will be required to consider arrangements for neighbourhood governance, considering the provisions of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. The Bill requires local authorities in England to make appropriate arrangements to secure the effective governance of any area of a specified description that falls within the authority’s area (a “neighbourhood area”). These arrangements will put the Councils’ members at the centre of their respective community’s local governance and support the oversight and delivery of each Council’s proposed method for engagement in and with their distinct areas. Detailed Regulations as to the nature of the required arrangements will follow enactment of the Bill, but in advance of this an approach for how this will be achieved is set out later in this Proposal.

As an example of a possible approach to these arrangements, and the future engagement of the new Councils’ members, in the present Staffordshire Moorlands area, the six larger localities are being grouped together to develop place-based profiles for each which will:

- Identify the communities and population that the new unitary council will be required to support
- Identifying trends that will determine future need
- Develop an overview of local economies and the linkages with elsewhere
- Identify opportunities for public service reform
- Identify opportunities to design more holistic and people-centred services

The development of Locality Plans for each area, underpinned by the place-based profiles, will be supported by the establishment of Town Centre and Locality Partnerships across the Staffordshire Moorlands, comprising members of the district council and representatives of the private, public and voluntary community sectors. Such an arrangement could form part of the new North Staffordshire Council’s neighbourhood arrangements, together with any further governance proposals such as area committees within the Council area. Similar arrangements will be required in the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council.

Council Size Recommendation

Considering all the requirements which will be placed on the membership of the new Councils it is proposed that the:

North Staffordshire Council has a membership of 92 councillors; and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council has a membership of 84 councillors.

Indicative Warding Arrangements

North Staffordshire Council - In the absence of a LGBCE review, it would be complex to consider a warding pattern that does other than leave the current Stoke on Trent City Council wards and membership as they currently are. The current ratio in the City Council area is 4,500 electors per councillor (an increase from the 3,989 figure referred to in the City's last LGBCE review in 2021), which becomes the starting point for consideration of future arrangements.

In this proposed Council area, outside of the city area, there will be 16 County Electoral Divisions in the Newcastle Under Lyme BC and Staffordshire Moorlands DC district areas (Electoral Divisions being considered the most suitable building block for developing new arrangements, having recently been reviewed by the LGBCE in 2024). Within the Divisions there is a disparity between the largest Division – Biddulph South and Endon at 11,970 electors, and the smallest Division – Bradwell and Porthill at 9,422 electors. This disparity between Wards is also apparent in the City Council area, with Dresden and Florence Ward having only 3,680 electors for example. To avoid over-representation in the current City Council area, and relative under-representation in the other areas contained within this proposal, and to ensure effective and convenient local government, it is necessary to consider redesignating the current County Electoral Divisions into multi-member wards.

Four further Electoral Divisions (with some parish wards/councils) are added to the new electoral area proposed in the new Council, again using Electoral Divisions as the building blocks, namely:

From the Stafford Borough Council area:

- Stone Rural North Electoral Division
- Stone Urban Electoral Division
- Aston Parish Ward of Stone Rural Parish Council (currently in Stafford Trent Valley Electoral Division)
- St Michael's East Ward of the Stone Town Council (currently in Stafford Trent Valley Electoral Division)

From the East Staffordshire Borough Council area:

- Uttoxeter Rural Electoral Division
- Uttoxeter Town Electoral Division

The Divisions/Wards added ensure that the current Parish Council arrangements are preserved within the Stafford Borough area and avoids the splitting of any parish wards from their Council which would not be permissible in the absence of a LGBCE review. It also retains the connectivity between the two Stone Electoral Divisions and the two Uttoxeter Divisions.

This proposal offers the opportunity to ensure effective and convenient local government arrangements, and to better reflect the equality of electors per councillor, by the creation of both 2-member Electoral Divisions and 3-member Electoral Divisions, according to the number of electors in each. It is proposed, therefore, that all Electoral Divisions within the former SCC area are redesignated as 2-member Divisions, save for the 8 Divisions set out in *Figure 35* which, by reason of their size, are redesignated as 3-member Divisions:

Electoral Division	Electorate 1st May 2025
Stone Urban	12,276
Stone Rural North	12,011
Biddulph South and Endon	11,886
Leek South	11,579
Kidsgrove	11,249
Cheadle and Checkley	11,243
Talke and Red Street	11,236
Churnet Valley	11,034

Figure 35: Proposed 3-Member Divisions in the North Staffordshire Unitary in the Indicative Warding Arrangements

The electorate of Stone Rural North Division will increase by the addition of electors from the remaining part of Stone Rural Parish Council and Stone Urban Division by electors from St Michael's East Parish Ward of the Stone Town Council, further justifying the additional councillor in each.

Based on the proposal above, 92 councillors will be elected to the new Council, with 44 elected from the former SOTCC area and 48 from the former SCC area. This proposal, therefore, may be considered a pragmatic approach to seek to address many of the issues in the previous options considered by the Council by better securing effective electoral representation, with improved electoral equality for voters; ensuring effective and convenient local government; and avoiding the dominance of the former City Council in the new electoral arrangements.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council - The Southern and Mid-Staffordshire area does not have the Stoke City Council issue to address in electoral terms – i.e. existing wards, which in the absence of a formal review must remain, with a smaller electorate to councillor ratio (4,500 to 1) than the current County Council number (10,744 to 1 at May 2024). Therefore, there is no issue to address in an area of the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council with an electorate ratio which has been determined by a different LGBCE review.

After removing the 20 Electoral Divisions in the North of the County area which are contained in the proposal for the new North Staffordshire Council, 42 Electoral Divisions, electing 42 councillors, remain in what will become the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Council. The most pragmatic approach to new electoral arrangements in this area is to create 42 2-member wards in the existing Electoral Divisions, which will provide for a new Council membership of 84 councillors, as proposed from the consideration of all relevant issues above.

Although it is accepted that there is a disparity in the equality of electorate numbers within the Electoral Divisions (ranging from 7,992 in Lichfield Rural North to 12,575 in Stafford South East), these have not been created by the Council's proposals in developing this option and were considered appropriate by the LGBCE in their review last year. It is also accepted that there will be a reduction in the electorate in the Stafford Trent Valley ED arising from these proposals (i.e. as a result of the removal of the Aston Parish Ward of the Stone Rural Parish Council and St Michael's East Ward of the Stone Town Council), however, it is unlikely that by removing these electors from the Division (which currently has 11,426 electors) a significant electoral imbalance will result (provision of the electoral register numbers by Stafford BC for each both Wards would be required to provide clarity).

Appendix F contains details of the indicative electoral wards for the two unitary councils including each ward's electorate and number of councillors.

Bringing Decision Making Closer to Neighbourhoods; Neighbourhood Governance and Empowerment

A County of Distinct Places – Futures Built Locally

Staffordshire is a county of rich and diverse communities, each with its own history, culture and identity. From the industrial heritage of North Staffordshire: coal, ceramics, steel and canals, to the historic market towns, royal connections and rural parishes of the mid and South, communities across the county have developed strong local pride and deep civic traditions.

The inclusion of Stoke-on-Trent within the proposed North Staffordshire unitary further enhances the logic of the model. Stoke shares deep economic, social and cultural linkages with Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, forming a functional geography that already collaborates across health, transport, skills and housing. The area's industrial heritage, urban-rural interdependence and shared workforce patterns create a coherent sub-regional identity distinct from the Southern districts. The inclusion of Stoke-on-Trent strengthens the Northern area's urban core, providing economic scale and shared infrastructure for growth around advanced manufacturing, logistics and health innovation, while maintaining close functional links with surrounding rural communities in the Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Incorporating Stoke-on-Trent consolidates this natural footprint, aligning governance with the lived reality of residents and service users. It enables strategic coordination on growth, regeneration and public health while maintaining a strong sense of place-based leadership rooted in North Staffordshire's communities.

Creating two new unitary councils on a North Staffordshire/Southern and Mid-Staffordshire basis provides the opportunity to preserve these identities while delivering consistent, high-quality services. Any split of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent on a West/East basis would result in each area not possessing or sharing such distinct or coherent identities.

Two unitary councils provide both the strategic scale to coordinate services efficiently and the local closeness that allows communities to influence priorities, shape budgets and co-design services that meet their unique needs.

Neighbourhoods at the heart of Staffordshire's future

By establishing two unitary councils, North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Staffordshire will ensure that decision-making, service delivery and prevention remain rooted in local communities, while maintaining the strategic scale needed for coherent, county-wide oversight. This approach recognises the distinct identities of North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire, protecting local character, pride and culture. Through Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs) and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs), aligned with NHS Neighbourhood Health initiatives (Integrated Local Care Teams (ILCTs), residents and partners will be empowered to shape services, address needs early and deliver outcomes that matter most to their communities.

The two-unitary model balances local influence with strategic leadership, preserving the agility, trust and place-based insight that Staffordshire communities already demonstrate, while providing the resources and capacity to scale preventative, integrated and evidence-based approaches across the county. The approach demonstrates a forward-looking approach to local government, putting people, place, and prevention at the heart of every decision. This ensures that both North and South communities can thrive, influence services and see tangible results

from their engagement.

Across Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, residents, Town and Parish councils and local representatives consistently expressed support for the two-unitary model to combine strategic oversight with local responsiveness. Feedback highlighted that embedding Locality Champions, devolved budgets, and structured multi-agency partnerships ensure community voices shape tangible outcomes, strengthening neighbourhood empowerment across the county.

The principles that underpin this model are simple yet powerful; listening to residents, tailoring services to the local context and preventing problems before they escalate.

Listen • Tailor • Prevent

The new unitary councils will build on the two-tier area's existing commitment to listening to residents, tailoring services to the needs of each community and preventing challenges before they escalate.

- **Listen** - Residents' voices are central to identifying local priorities and shaping service delivery. Engagement with communities, voluntary organisations and Town and Parish councils ensures decisions reflect lived experience.
- **Tailor** - Services are designed to respond to the distinctive character, challenges and opportunities of each neighbourhood. North Staffordshire's industrial towns have different needs from the historic market towns and rural communities of the South.
- **Prevent** - Early intervention and proactive approaches reduce long-term demand on services, whether through addressing barriers to opportunity, supporting mental and physical wellbeing, improving housing, or tackling social isolation

These principles underpin the neighbourhood governance model proposed for the two new unitary councils, ensuring that engagement translates into accountability and action.

Stakeholder feedback gathered from workshops, surveys and interviews from residents, Town and Parish councils and local representatives emphasised that local voices are central to identifying priorities and shaping services. Residents highlighted the importance of Locality Champions, ensuring that neighbourhood engagement is systematic, visible and responsive to both urban and rural communities. Feedback reinforced that smaller towns and parishes must not be overshadowed by larger urban centres, and that tailored approaches are essential to reflect diverse community needs and strengthen local accountability.

This philosophy is embedded in the design of NACs and INTs, ensuring residents can influence local priorities while services respond in a coordinated, proactive way.

Delivering this vision requires clear structural foundations. The following four elements describe how strategic leadership, neighbourhood governance and partnership working combine to build local power.

Building local power through four key elements:

1). Two unitary councils as strategic enablers

The two-unitary model provides the strategic scale and coherence needed to tackle county-wide challenges while preserving the distinct identity, character and priorities of individual communities. By creating North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils, the model recognises and reflects the diversity of the area.

Each unitary council will provide the resources, capacity and leadership to support neighbourhood-level structures, such as NACs and INTs, ensuring services are locally responsive, preventative and aligned with resident priorities. This approach balances strategic oversight with local autonomy, enabling tailored solutions to social, economic and environmental challenges while fostering collaboration across communities, partners and sectors.

Stakeholder engagement from the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council area emphasised that two unitary councils allow for both scale and responsiveness. **By bringing together functions currently spread across multiple tiers, this model also enables greater coherence, reducing administrative complexity and duplication. Streamlined governance releases capacity and financial headroom to reinvest in prevention, early intervention and locally identified priorities.** MPs and community groups highlighted that aligning governance with functional economic zones strengthens regeneration, skills investment and infrastructure planning.

In essence:

- North and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire councils will provide coherence, resources and oversight while keeping decision-making close to residents
- They will maintain a clear line of accountability and enable collaboration with health, education, housing and community safety partners
- Two unitary councils will enable targeted strategic planning, supporting initiatives such as industrial regeneration in the North (e.g. Chatterley Valley West, Stafford Riverside) and tourism, heritage and visitor economy growth in the South (Visitor Economy Action Plan 2023 - 2026), ensuring locally tailored action within a county-wide framework

2). Neighbourhood Area Committees: local priorities, local accountability

The NAC structures adopted by both new unitary councils will ensure that residents, councillors, Town and Parish Councils and local organisations have a direct role in shaping services and decisions in their communities. Each NAC will be tailored to the distinctive character of its area, recognising the industrial heritage of the North, the historic market towns of the South and the rural parishes across the county.

Residents and Town and Parish Councils consistently stressed the need for clear representation, appropriate councillor numbers and meaningful roles in shaping local decisions. Feedback from Staffordshire Moorlands District Council residents reinforced these points, underscoring the value of Locality Champions, devolved budgets, and structured engagement processes. Town and Parish Councils indicated that clustering smaller parishes would ensure influence is maintained while enabling efficient service delivery. This demonstrates strong support for NACs as a mechanism to translate local insight into actionable priorities. Parish cluster

engagement demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating local voices, with communities articulating service priorities and partnership aspirations. Structured frameworks for Locality Plans and Locality Champions were highlighted as key mechanisms to ensure resident input translates into operational and policy outcomes.

NACs will:

- Include elected councillors, Town and Parish councillors (where they exist), VCSE organisations, local businesses and residents to provide a hyper-local perspective
- Reflect the varied governance landscape across Staffordshire, recognising that while some areas (such as Staffordshire Moorlands, Lichfield and South Staffordshire) are fully parished, others have fewer or no Town or Parish Councils, including Stoke-on-Trent and Tamworth
- Ensure equitable community voice by creating alternative representation mechanisms in non-parished areas, such as community forums, resident panels or neighbourhood partnerships, to maintain consistent local accountability and influence
- Hold devolved budgets, enabling them to take meaningful action on local priorities rather than only advising the unitary councils
- Translate resident insight and intelligence into operational priorities for INTs, ensuring services are responsive, preventative, and evidence informed
- Promote inclusive participation, providing support and capacity-building to residents and voluntary organisations who may not have experience in decision-making
- Align with Neighbourhood Health initiatives, community safety partnerships and existing district-level programmes to ensure a

coordinated, place-based approach.

- Each NAC will cover a population size that reflects natural communities (typically 30,000 to 50,000 residents), ensuring coverage is neither too large to dilute local influence nor too small to be resourced effectively. Boundaries will consider urban/rural mix, socio-economic diversity, Parish Council clusters and existing service delivery patterns, so each NAC is meaningful, coherent and accessible to residents.

This approach ensures that communities influence decisions that affect them, see tangible outcomes from their input and retain the distinct identity and character of their local areas.

3). Integrated Neighbourhood Teams: Turning local priorities into action

Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will form the operational backbone of each unitary council's neighbourhood governance model. Working within the footprints of NACs, INTs ensure that priorities, insights and aspirations identified by residents, councillors and local partners are translated into tangible, locally tailored action.

INTs are designed to respond to the distinctive needs of each new unitary council's diverse communities. In the North, INTs will operate across Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Moorlands, aligning with existing NHS neighbourhood footprints and local partnership boundaries to ensure continuity and coherence of delivery. In the South, NACs will reflect the unique character of South Staffordshire's historic market towns, including Lichfield, Tamworth, Cannock and Stafford and the surrounding rural parishes, ensuring that services and decision-making are responsive to local priorities, community networks and the social, economic and environmental context of each area.

INTs collaborate closely with Town and Parish Councils, voluntary sector partners, Police, local businesses, and NHS neighbourhood health teams, ensuring delivery is coordinated, preventative and evidence informed.

Stakeholder feedback confirmed the importance of multi-agency coordination and preventative approaches. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council stakeholders particularly highlighted the opportunity to align INT footprints with NACs and existing ILCTs, ensuring continuity, clarity, and neighbourhood-level responsiveness. Residents and local leaders emphasised that meaningful engagement must lead to tangible influence over local services and welcomed the ability of two unitary councils to coordinate multi-agency support while maintaining local accountability. Residents and local representatives highlighted the need for transparency, accountability, and that engagement must lead to tangible influence on services. Aligning INT footprints with NACs and ILCTs was strongly supported to maintain clarity, continuity, and responsiveness at the neighbourhood level.

Existing NHS Infrastructure: Integrated Local Care Teams

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent already have a network of c.32 ILCTs, sometimes referred to as neighbourhood health teams. ILCTs comprise nursing and adult social care teams who support frail, older people and those with long-term conditions such as asthma, diabetes, heart failure and kidney disease.

They provide proactive care to prevent crises, working closely with GPs, specialist nurses and therapy teams to assess needs, create personalised care plans and assign a single care coordinator, such as a social worker, district nurse, or therapist.

ILCTs currently operate across both North and South Staffordshire, from health centres and community clinics in towns and settlements including Hanley, Bentilee, Longton, Meir, Stafford, Cannock, Tamworth

and Lichfield. These teams provide district nursing, therapy and reablement, care coordination, mental health input, and hospital-avoidance/discharge support. Organised around GP practice groupings, ILCT boundaries can cross council borders, with strategic oversight and future scale-up driven by the ICS 10-Year Neighbourhood Health Plan.

Building on Integrated Neighbourhood Teams: as multi-agency hubs

The proposed INTs are designed to build on the existing network of ILCT models but expand it into multi-agency, neighbourhood-focused structures. INTs bring together housing, social care, policing, VCSE organisations, public health and other relevant partners to deliver preventative interventions and early support, ensuring that residents do not enter statutory systems unnecessarily.

Careful consideration will be given to aligning INT footprints with these established teams, maximising the benefits of existing local knowledge, co-location and relationships. This ensures services are coordinated, prevents duplication and maintains clear lines of accountability. By integrating local intelligence and resident insight with multi-agency delivery, INTs will focus on preventative action and early intervention, aiming to reduce avoidable escalation into statutory services while ensuring residents receive timely, appropriate support.

Implementing INTs will also require formal partnership discussions and agreements across all participating organisations. Clear governance, shared objectives and defined responsibilities will be critical to ensuring integrated delivery, coordinated decision-making and the ability to act quickly on preventative interventions at the neighbourhood level.

To ensure maximum effectiveness and prevent duplication, clear roles and remits will be defined for INTs and existing ILCTs. Formal agreements and governance arrangements will set out

responsibilities, decision-making authority and coordination mechanisms, ensuring that health, social care and community services work together seamlessly while maintaining neighbourhood-level responsiveness.

While ILCTs remain an important foundation for health delivery, INTs provide a wider, coordinated lens, bringing together multi-agency partners, aligning with NAC priorities and existing ILCT footprints and focusing on prevention and early intervention at the neighbourhood level:

- **Multi-agency coordination:** INTs convene local partners, aligning statutory and community services around neighbourhood priorities and ensuring roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
- **Prevention and early intervention:** Teams proactively address social, health and environmental risks, focusing on stopping avoidable escalation into statutory services

- **Specialist support on demand:** Clinical and specialist inputs are drawn in as needed, avoiding duplication while ensuring residents receive the right support at the right time
- **NAC alignment:** INTs will be aligned with NAC boundaries and existing ILCT footprints, maximising existing infrastructure, local knowledge and collaborative delivery

This approach maximises the value of existing infrastructure, embeds resident influence and ensures neighbourhood governance and service delivery are fully integrated, responsive and preventative. *Figure 36* summarises the proposed approach.

	Purpose	Key Partners	Coverage/Footprint	Notes
Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs)	Gather resident insight Set local priorities Influence services	Residents Elected councillors Town and Parish Councils VCSE Local businesses	c.30-50k residents per NAC	Devolved budgets Advisory and decision-making role
Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs)	Deliver coordinated, multi-agency services aligned to NAC priorities	Social care Housing Police Public Health VCSE NHS	Aligned with NAC footprints, often overlapping ILCT locations	Builds on existing NHS ILCTs; focuses on prevention and early intervention
Integrated Local Care Teams (ILCTs)	Deliver proactive health and care services	NHS GPs Therapy and nursing specialists Adult social care	c.32 teams across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent	Health-focused; provides backbone for INTs; already operational

Figure 36: Proposed Approach to Neighbourhood Working

Together, these three tiers create a joined-up system where resident insight drives priorities, and integrated teams deliver outcomes at neighbourhood level.

Operational Delivery and Local Impact

By embedding local intelligence, lived experience and multi-agency collaboration, INTs ensure that community priorities do not remain advisory, but result in visible outcomes that improve everyday life for residents.

INTs act as a flexible, adaptive layer of delivery, able to respond quickly to emerging challenges while maintaining continuity with strategic objectives set by the new unitary councils.

This creates a continuous, accountable cycle: NACs gather resident insight and set local priorities; INTs deliver services aligned with those priorities and feedback from delivery informs ongoing planning, evaluation and improvement; keeping communities at the centre of decision-making.

In essence:

- INTs turn forum priorities into action, delivering coordinated services across sectors
- Teams are iterative and adaptive, responding to local intelligence, resident insight and evaluation to continuously improve outcomes and neighbourhood empowerment

To ensure neighbourhood governance is both locally responsive and strategically aligned, the unitary councils will integrate the expertise, networks and capacity of Town and Parish councils and VCSE organisations into the operation of NACs and INTs, creating a coordinated, preventative and community-led approach to service delivery.

4). Partnership with Town and Parish councils and Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) networks

The existing network of Town and Parish Councils and the vibrant VCSE sector form a critical foundation for neighbourhood governance across the two new unitary councils. These locally rooted organisations bring deep insight into community priorities, assets and challenges and their active participation is essential to realising the vision of empowered neighbourhoods under the two-unitary model.

Town and Parish Councils as Core Partners

Town and Parish Councils will be treated as core partners in local governance, with the opportunity to manage community assets, co-design local services and shape neighbourhood priorities. While parish coverage varies across the two-tier area, some areas, such as parts of the Moorlands, are only partly parished, and places such as Stoke-on-Trent and Tamworth have no Town Councils; the model is designed to be flexible. In unparished areas, alternative mechanisms such as community forums, neighbourhood panels or resident partnerships will ensure representation and accountability are maintained.

Where smaller parishes lack scale, clustering arrangements under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will enable joint management of services and assets. These clusters will define membership, governance, financial contributions and reporting mechanisms, ensuring smaller communities retain influence while operating efficiently.

VCSE Sector as a Strategic Delivery Partner

The VCSE sector plays an equally vital role. The Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Cabinet Report (October 2024) on Working with the VCSE Sector describes local organisations as deeply embedded within their communities and well positioned to mobilise volunteers and local resources effectively. By collaborating with VCSE bodies, the two new unitary councils will co-design services that are preventative, responsive and grounded in lived experience.

Formal partnership arrangements, such as Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and shared performance frameworks, will enhance role clarity, accountability and mutual expectations, reduce duplication while maximising impact. This approach aligns with the Local Government Association's 2022 guidance, which emphasises that mature council-VCSE relationships are characterised by co-production, joint commissioning and shared accountability.

Embedding Collaboration and Preventative Action

Through the VCSE Collaborative Working Plan (2024), Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has already committed to embedding collaboration within core service delivery. The plan promotes co-delivery, information sharing, co-location and community asset use, supported by annual reporting to councillors for transparency and scrutiny.

Operating through two unitary councils enhances capacity to deepen these partnerships. Each will tailor its engagement to local priorities, whether tackling health inequalities, supporting social inclusion, or delivering cost-of-living initiatives, ensuring that preventative, community-led action becomes a defining feature of neighbourhood working.

Supporting NACs and INTs

These partnership arrangements directly underpin the success of NACs and INTs. Through co-design, devolved budgets and formal agreements, Town and Parish Councils and VCSE organisations will help translate local priorities into tangible outcomes, ensuring that neighbourhood governance remains close to residents, consistent across geographies and rooted in place.

Evidence of Existing Local Engagement and Impact

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have a strong tradition of community engagement and partnership working. **Appendix F** provides further evidence of this and summarises Town and Parish- and VCSE-led initiatives, county-wide strategies and local case studies that demonstrate how neighbourhood insight is already shaping outcomes on the ground.

Building on this foundation, the following section, the LGR Roadmap: From Listening to Doing, sets out a practical framework for turning engagement into delivery. It describes how NACs and INTs will move from concept to implementation, embedding local accountability, integration and prevention across both new unitary councils.

LGR Roadmap: From Listening to Doing

To turn the vision of empowered, neighbourhood-focused councils into reality, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council has developed a four-phase roadmap for implementing NACs and INTs.

This roadmap sets out how neighbourhood voices will shape decision-making, service delivery and preventative action across both North and South unitary councils. By working closely with town and parish Councils, VCSE networks and residents, it reflects the diverse needs of the county; from historic market towns and rural parishes to larger urban

centres, ensuring neighbourhood governance is tailored, inclusive and effective.

The roadmap provides a practical framework for moving from engagement to implementation; ensuring that local voice is not just heard but translated into action. Each phase has a distinct purpose: to design, test, scale and sustain neighbourhood governance and integrated delivery arrangements that reflect the diversity of each new unitary council's communities. Together, they create a structured, evidence-based pathway to embed local accountability, strengthen collaboration and deliver preventative, person-centred outcomes across the new unitary councils.

Each phase builds on the last, moving from co-design with communities, through iterative learning and refinement, to full implementation and continuous improvement, embedding local influence, integrated services and preventative action at the heart of the two new unitary councils.

Phase 1 - Co-design

Purpose: To collaboratively design the framework for NAC and INTs, ensuring all community types; urban, rural and market town shape how neighbourhood governance will work in practice.

- Determine Pathfinder NAC/INT locations to reflect diversity (urban/rural balance, socio-economic mix, Parish Council clusters)
- Boundaries should respect community coherence, not just administrative convenience
- Co-design operating principles and KPIs with residents, councillors, VCSE and service leads
- Balanced representation - ensure diverse engagement across socio-economic and ethnic groups
- Align with existing initiatives: Pride in Place (Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Stafford Borough Councils),

ILCTs, Community Safety Partnerships

- Gather baseline data on engagement, service responsiveness and community wellbeing

Phase 2 - Test and learn

Purpose: To pilot and refine the NAC and INT model through Pathfinder areas, gathering insight on what works, strengthening accountability and testing devolved approaches before wider rollout.

- Monitor Pathfinder NACs/INTs and refine neighbourhood footprints
- Evaluate devolved budgets and decision-making processes
- Gather feedback from residents, Town/Parish Councils, VCSE partners and frontline staff. Feedback from residents, Parish Councils, and VCSE partners reinforces the need for structured engagement mechanisms. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council residents specifically highlighted the importance of testing engagement approaches that ensure smaller communities are not overshadowed by larger urban areas. They encouraged iterative learning from early NAC/INT pilots to refine neighbourhood footprints, ensure devolved budgets respond to local priorities, and maintain clear lines of accountability throughout the scaling process
- Focus on preventative outcomes, reducing demand through early intervention
- Share insights and best practice across the two unitary councils: capture lessons from Pathfinder NACs and INTs, including what works in urban, industrial, historic and rural communities; disseminate findings to other neighbourhoods, local teams and partner organisations to build a county-wide learning culture and continuously improve service delivery

Phase 3 - Scale across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

Purpose: To expand successful models county-wide, embedding consistent engagement, devolved decision-making and visible local accountability across all neighbourhoods.

- Expand NACs and INTs across remaining neighbourhoods. Stakeholder input stresses the importance of embedding consistent engagement across all neighbourhoods. Parish clusters should be supported to maintain influence, resources, and visibility, particularly in smaller or rural communities. Residents expect transparent communication and evidence that their contributions lead to tangible outcomes, ensuring local priorities continue to shape decision-making as NACs and INTs scale county-wide.
- Support clustering where Town and Parish Councils can share resources efficiently
- Embed digital engagement tools, transparent reporting and dedicated officer support
- Strengthen cross-sector partnerships (VCSE, health, education, police, housing)

Phase 4 - System integration and continuous improvement

Purpose: To embed neighbourhood working as a core feature of each new unitary council’s governance and service delivery models, ensuring it continuously adapts to resident feedback, population change and emerging needs.

- Further integration of services into INTs while maintaining neighbourhood focus
- Build local capacity for evidence-based decision-making and preventative action
- Monitor and evaluate outcomes on prevention, integration and resident empowerment
- Adjust NAC footprints and INT operations dynamically to reflect population shifts, emerging local needs and lessons learned

This four-phase roadmap provides a clear pathway from community engagement to delivery. It ensures that the two new unitary councils embed neighbourhood influence, integration and prevention at every level of governance. The next phase will focus on translating this framework into implementation plans, governance arrangements and resource models to sustain neighbourhood empowerment over time.

9

Implementation of Local Government Reorganisation

Preparing for Implementing Local Government Reorganisation

It is recognised that developing the optimal local government structure for Staffordshire presents both immense potential and inherent risks and challenges. This proposal outlines a proposed approach to navigate this effectively. The approach includes required implementation activities that will ensure that the necessary steps are taken, post the submission of the proposal submission, post the Secretary of State’s decision to implement, leading up to the creation of the shadow unitary councils and through to the implementation of the new structure on 1st April 2028.

The proposed programme structure is designed to maximise the efficient use of time leading up to vesting day.

The leadership of the Councils across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, comprising experienced elected members and Chief Executives, bring a wealth of complementary skills and strategic governance expertise, supported by a strong workforce, to ensure the necessary competencies and capabilities to successfully deliver LGR.

Collaborative working in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent has mitigated many of the challenges faced by its local authorities. There are already many examples of bringing together shared/joint services (examples set out in *Figure 37*) and this experience will be applied to safely negotiate reorganisation to minimise disruption for staff, residents, stakeholders and businesses, and support the councillors elected in shadow elections with the development of two new functioning unitary councils.

Staffordshire County Council Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Safeguarding
Cannock Chase District Council Stafford Borough Council	A single leadership/ management team in place with shared services across the two councils
Lichfield District Council Tamworth Borough Council	Waste Collection
Lichfield District Council South Staffordshire District Council Tamworth Borough Council	Building Control
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	All services shared through a strategic alliance with High Peak Borough Council in Derbyshire

Figure 37: Examples of Existing Shared Services in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

The competitive nature of the local government reorganisation process has limited the extent to which the 10 local authorities have worked together on local government reorganisation. This has disrupted the strong collaborative culture that exists in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent through the Staffordshire Leaders Board and the Staffordshire Chief Executives Group. Once the proposal submission date passes, it will be necessary to reset the focus of the collaborative work to ensure that preparations for the development of the new unitary authorities include all councils. There will be a period of uncertainty between December 2025 (when the proposals are submitted) and July 2026 (when the Secretary of State’s decision is expected). It will be important that during this time that the required implementation activities that are common to all proposals e.g. preparation for service disaggregation and reaggregation are progressed.

Design Principles for the Target Operating Model

The approach to implementation will be guided by a set of established design principles which will inform the target operating model and implementation. These are set out in *Figure 38*.

Local accountability and decision making	- Services reflect local needs whilst achieving efficiencies at scale - Local decision-making will be transparent, visible, and accessible to residents
Insight led	- Robust data, analytics and feedback inform priorities - Understanding of demands - Systems to monitor impacts and improve outcomes
Sustainability	- Financial sustainability as the foundation - Focus on longer-term planning - Investment in prevention and early intervention - Optimising use of assets - Minimising the environmental impact of service delivery.
Digital first - inclusive by design	- Embrace the use of digital and AI technology in service design - Appropriate support for digitally excluded or disadvantaged groups
Outcome focussed	- Clear emphasis on outcomes - Continued focus on the economic growth that benefits both current and future generations - Outcomes will be linked to the Local Government Outcomes Framework
Empowerment	- One team approach across the new unitary councils - Delivery-focused culture that encourages learning, innovation, trust and respect - Citizens, elected members, and the workforce engaged and empowered to shape new councils
Collaboration	- Work with local partners to exploit the opportunities for public sector reform - Foster stronger, safer communities and a thriving, inclusive economy

Figure 38: Design Principles for the New Unitary Councils

Implementation Plan

The proposed implementation plan will have six phases:

Phase 1 – Plan and define

Prior to the Secretary of State's decision on the proposal to be implemented, it will be necessary to:

- Agree Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with all Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent councils to set out the approach to implementation and the commitment required from each of the local authorities
- Establish the Implementation Programme governance and appropriate supporting workstreams
- Identify and agree the necessary resources to develop the pre and post decision transition
- Confirm the Implementation Plan including timescales and critical path
- Confirm the design principles and the target operating model
- Establish data sharing requirements and set up a data hub to gather and maintain required data
- Define and agree scope of LGR-related decision-making with existing councils

Phase 2 - Building the foundations

Following the Secretary of State's decision up to the election of councillors to the shadow councils the following tasks will be required.

- Establishment of new Joint Committees for the two unitary councils
- Agree Structural Changes Order and Section 24 Direction with MHCLG
- Agree arrangements for compliance with the Section 24 Directions
- Redefine the scope of the Implementation Programme e.g. ICT infrastructure, treatment of systems and contracts etc.
- Review target operating models and transformation proposals
- Establish service alignments, disaggregation and integration requirements
- Map key decisions for the two joint committees
- Agree Councils' size and warding arrangements
- Preparation for and implementation of the shadow elections

Phase 3 – Shadow authority

Post shadow elections and appointment of interim leadership it will be necessary for the Shadow Authorities to:

- Confirm member leadership arrangements
- Complete member inductions
- Map key decisions for the shadow authorities
- Appointing Chief Executives and statutory and key leadership roles and interim arrangements if required
- Establish required management arrangements
- Agree process for TUPE transfer of predecessor councils and assess implications
- Confirm Job Evaluation policies and approach to harmonisation of terms and conditions
- Develop a detailed roadmap for requirement recruitment
- Commence recruitment process
- Develop a Forward Plan of Key Decisions
- Consider approach to Council Tax Harmonisation

Phase 4 – Leadership

After the appointment of senior leadership teams, there will need to be a focus on:

- Completing the operational management recruitment process
- Development of Corporate Plans and Medium-Term Financial Plans
- Undertake Service Planning process
- Establish key policies and strategies
- Further develop operating model with staffing allocations
- Complete preparation for Day 1 of operation with a focus on critical systems and processes

Phase 5 – Go-live

On the go live day the new Councils will be operational and the focus for the point will be ensuring a seamless experience for residents and partners and stability for staff.

Phase 6 – Extended transformation

Post implantation date the new unitary councils will need to:

- Enact the Corporate Plan and Service Plans and commence full integration
- Establish a medium-term transformation plan which facilitates the identified service improvements
- Establish arrangements to embed

The timelines for the implementation plan are set out in **Figure 39**.

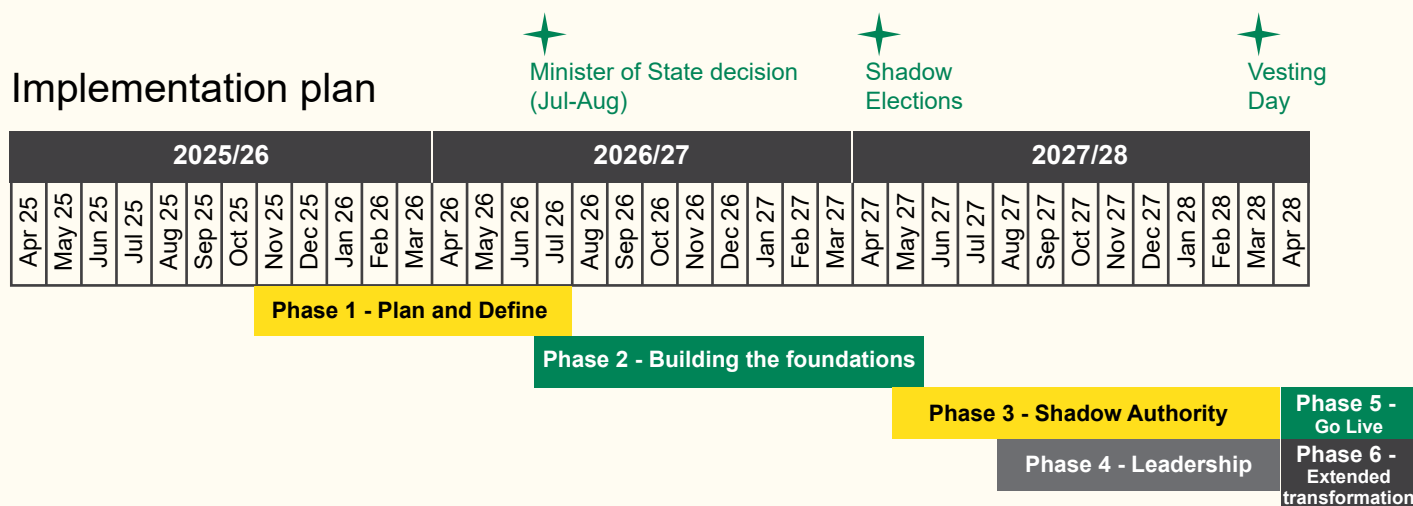


Figure 39: Implementation Plan Timelines

Governance Arrangements

The importance of operating a robust programme with clear governance is recognised. This ensures consistency, efficiency, and provides the ability to address challenges collectively where possible. Figure 40 provides a summary of the proposed decision-making and governance structure. This governance structure will evolve as the programme progresses.

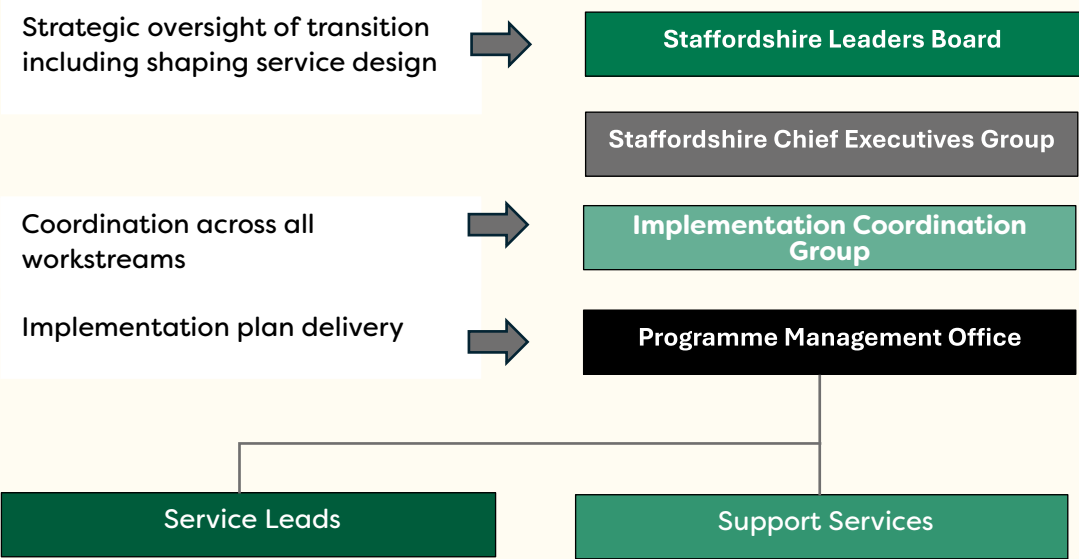


Figure 40: Summary of the proposed decision-making and governance structure

There will be two fundamental events which will involve revisions of the strategic oversight arrangements:

- Post the Secretary of State’s decision, when Joint Committees will be created for each of the new unitary councils, and
- Post the establishment of the Shadow Authorities when they will assume the responsibilities for oversight and strategic direction

The compilation, roles for decision-making and accountabilities in the governance structure are set out in *Figure 41*.

Group	Compilation/LGR Role
Staffordshire Leaders Board	Existing Joint Committee comprising the 10 existing local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Provides leadership, co-ordination and key decision making on issues impacting the whole geography Role – Strategic oversight of the Implementation Plan
Staffordshire Chief Executives Group	Existing Group comprising the 9 Chief Executives that lead 10 local authorities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Role – Support the Leaders Board with strategic oversight role and ensure action for the delivery of the programme involving each of the 10 local authorities
Implementation Coordination Group	Group made up of senior leaders from each of the 10 local authorities specifically established to coordinate delivery of the Implementation Plan Role – Coordination across all workstreams. Key tasks to include: • Day 1 readiness • Effective disaggregation and transformation of services
Programme Management Office	Resource established by the 10 local authorities to manage the Implementation Programme Role – Delivery of implementation Plan and management of budget
Service Leads	Individuals designated by the local authorities to lead service delivery teams for each of the local authority services Role – Determining the disaggregation and transition of each service into the new unitary councils
Support Services	Groups designated by the local authorities to support programme delivery Role - Provide the necessary support services, finance, legal, ICT etc. to the LGR implementation teams

Figure 41: Roles for decision-making and accountability for Implementation Plan

Transition and Transformation of Services

The required disaggregation and transition of County Council services, particularly social care, will demand meticulous planning to ensure minimal disruption for residents and provision for the sustained quality of services. The primary focus throughout this transition will be to achieve positive outcomes for residents. There are a number of critical enablers for a successful transformation:

Service Teams – the required disaggregation will be the principal focus for the design, planning and implementation of change, and will need to be supported by identified service leads and teams from existing councils. This will ensure that the appropriate skills and capabilities are in place to shape the future operating model.

Effective Governance and Accountability – will need to be established from the outset with robust interim structures, clear lines of accountability for statutory duties like safeguarding, and performance monitoring across all service areas.

Robust Service Disaggregation and Resource Allocation – will commence with a comprehensive review of the current locality structures and workforce deployment to ensure appropriate allocation of resources to each of the new unitary councils. This will include agreeing on future organisational designs and delivery structures, refining functional operating models and services to align with the North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Councils and providing for robust development of service policies, systems, processes, and procedures.

The Day 1 key priorities across all services are:

- **Continuity and Stability** – to ensure the seamless operation of essential services, from adult social care referrals and waste collections to public health initiatives and housing support. This means avoiding any delays in contracts or disruptions in care and maintaining existing provisions to ensure a ‘seamless transfer’ and that residents experience no service interruption.
- **Workforce Harmonisation and Alignment** – it will be critical to start to address differences in pay, terms, conditions, and role definitions across the workforce to foster a unified and fair environment. It is recognised from experiences from other transitional programmes, including the joint service development across the High Peak and Staffordshire Moorlands Strategic Alliance, that fully harmonising pay and conditions is a complex process that will take several years to manage. The Councils will need to be transparent about this journey and actively manage staff expectations throughout, providing clear communication and support at every stage.

- **Staff Engagement and Culture** - will need to be prioritised through open communication, clear role mapping, and transitional support, cultivating a shared culture that values every team member and maintains morale during this significant change
- **Internal and External Communication Strategies** - will be necessary to ensure our partners, residents, and businesses understand precisely how to access services and information, alongside actively maintaining and adjusting the existing strong partnerships with all stakeholders
- **Proactive Risk Management and Transition Planning** - It will be necessary to develop comprehensive risk registers, implement contingency plans, and apply lessons learned from previous transitions to minimise any potential disruption
- **System and Data Integration** - will require immediate attention to ensure underlying operational effectiveness in all ICT systems
- **Maintaining Partnership** will be key. Existing collaborations with health partners, schools, community groups, and key public service providers will need to be maintained and realigned around the new councils. This will provide the foundations for wider public service reform
- **Financial Oversight** - there will need to be a thorough grasp of all current contracts and budgets, coupled with robust financial oversight, to ensure the stability and sustainability of all the services from Day 1

10 Risk Management and Contingency Planning

Effective risk management is key to ensuring that the opportunities of local government reorganisation are maximised and the challenges and threats arising through the various stages are minimised.

The key risks that the implementation of local government reorganisation LGR are set out in Figure 42 alongside the proposed mitigations.

Risk	Impacts	Mitigation
Timescale expectations The timescales set by Government are challenging	The Secretary of State will not give consent to a proposal for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent until July 2026. This will allow only 20 months to mobilise the new unitary councils which will be challenging.	Strong and structured programme management
Insufficient capacity Transition will require a significant level of resource input	- Potential for service disruption - Temporary service inefficiencies or declines in quality during the transition period could lead to higher costs or poorer outcomes. - Any major disruption will lead to a loss of resident and stakeholder confidence.	- Early assessment and allocation of resources required to implement LGR - Early agreement of MoU to confirm commitment to resource allocation
Lack of Collaboration across the Councils Transition will require good levels of joint working	- Significant delays in decision making during implementation Insufficient resource allocation and duplicated effort - Political disagreements hindering progress and creating instability - Impact on service continuity and outcomes for stakeholders - Agree allocation of roles and tasks across the existing councils	Reset the collaborative arrangements Leaders and Chief Executives at the end of the competitive submission process
Disaggregation complexities Effective disaggregation will be complex and challenging	- Potential impact on implementation costs - Challenges for service continuity	- Early assessment of disaggregation requirements immediately post submission - Development of contingency plans
Integration complexities Transitioning the existing councils with different operational models, cultures and financial strategies	- May create difficulties in standardising processes and frustrate effective service design - Delays in making the anticipated financial savings.	- Early assessment of processes of predecessor councils to assess level of challenge - Ongoing assessment and management of costs

Risk	Impacts	Mitigation
Partnership structures and relationships Disruption in existing relationships and partnerships within communities	• Additional effort required to rebuild relationships • Disruption to existing arrangements during the arrangements • Potential impacts to locality/community-based partnerships creating frustration • May limit the focus on wider public service reform	• Agree Communications Strategy to span implementation period • Engage partners in service design to identify opportunities to improve outcomes for residents • Move towards new partnership structures with existing councils
Service delivery challenges Complexities in designing services that recognise the wider range of localities	• The cost of delivering services over larger geographical areas could increase, particularly in rural regions where travel times and infrastructure challenges may create inefficiencies. • Getting this right may take longer than expected.	• Establish detailed understanding of specific locality challenges • Structural analysis of service delivery requirements including early assessment of optimum service delivery hubs
Diseconomies of Scale Larger councils can often become bureaucratic and inefficient	• Could result in higher administrative costs that would impact on the forecast savings. • The existing smaller, more localised councils have a better understanding of specific community needs compared to larger unitary authorities and this could have an impact for local service delivery	• Ensure that support service requirements are accurately assessed and identify opportunities to rationalise structures to meet requirements • Embed neighbourhood working arrangements to accurately reflect local needs
Harmonisation of policies and procedures This could be more complex than expected	• Significant variations in policies across the predecessor councils could create delays in harmonisation • Could result in disparities in service delivery for longer than expected	• Early assessment of existing policies and procedures and develop detailed timescales for harmonisation • Identify implications for delays in harmonisation and produce contingency plan
System failure or data loss during migration Data disaggregation and systems integration will be complex	• Quality and compatibility of data is unknown at this stage and could impact on and increase the costs of transition • The complex nature of consolidating multiplicity of ICT systems could be complex and increase the risk of failure which could create service disruption	• Evaluate data quality and identify issues for transition • Establish detailed understanding of current ICT system and application infrastructure and establish consolidation plan • Establish detailed plan for data extraction consolidation into new ICT infrastructure
Residents and stakeholders Buy-in There are significant concerns about the potential loss of local identity and the disruption to service delivery during the transition	• Lack of residents buy in would require significant additional resources being deployed to give assurances • Dealing with challenges from residents would divert attention away from service transition	• Continuation of LGR related stakeholder engagement • Assurances to address concerns raised • Agree Communication Strategy to span implementation period

Risk	Impacts	Mitigation
Financial Risks The financial risks are set out in more detail in the financial risk assessment in <i>Figure 26</i> in Section 8 of the proposal	- Financial risks include: - Deliverability and Timing of Savings - Council tax Harmonisation - Implementation Costs - Waste Reforms - MTFP Variances - Funding Reviews - HRA Budget Pressures - Materialisation of these risks will impact on the forecast's financial benefits and potentially financial sustainability	- Councils to manage financial pressures proactively through locally controlled measures - Allocating appropriate resources to support LGR - Allocation of contingency funding to manage slippage - Timely and transparent exemplifications of impacts of funding changes - A few requests for Government support

Figure 42: Implementation of Local Government Reorganisation – Key Risks and Mitigation

Early in the implementation phase, a comprehensive risk management strategy will be developed. A comprehensive risk log will also be developed with detailed assessment of the risks. A supporting risk management framework will be put in place including the process designed to support effective delivery of the implementation programme and ensure that risks are managed effectively throughout the implementation.

Photos:

Cathy Bower, Alex Hyde, Jack Bailey, Lichfield District Council, Arena Photo UK, McArthurGlen DOWM, Anastasia Smanyuk Fotografie, Katarzyna Bialasiewicz Photographee.eu, Garry Downs, National Memorial Arboretum, Drayton Manor Resort, Nigel Kirby, Destination Staffordshire, Charlotte Evans, Forestry England, Greg Walker, Lee Blanchflower, www.peopleimages.com.

Appendix A

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent – Demographic Profile of Existing Districts and Boroughs

Appendix A1

Demographic Information – North Staffordshire Local Authorities

	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire Moorlands	Stoke-on-Trent
Area	Area of 81 square miles (8.04% of the County)	Area of 222 square miles (21.95% of the County)	Area of 36 square miles (3.56% of the County)
Residents	The resident population of Newcastle-under-Lyme in 2021 was 123,299 and is projected to be 137,913 by 2039. The predominant age band in Newcastle-under-Lyme in 2023 was 20 - 24 with 10,515 people out of the total population of 128,060. In 2023 Newcastle-under-Lyme had 20,536 people aged under 16 (representing 16.0% of the total population) and 27,320 people aged 65+ (representing 21.3% of the total population).	The resident population of Staffordshire Moorlands in 2021 was 95,845 and is projected to be 100,518 by 2039. The predominant age band in Staffordshire Moorlands in 2023 was 55 - 59 with 7,857 people out of the total population of 95,785. In 2023 Staffordshire Moorlands had 14,941 people aged under 16 (representing 15.6% of the total population) and 25,708 people aged 65+ (representing 26.8% of the total population).	The resident population of Stoke-on-Trent in 2021 was 258,366 and is projected to be 268,413 by 2039. The predominant age band in Stoke-on-Trent in 2023 was 30 - 34 with 19,256 people out of the total population of 263,157. In 2023 Stoke-on-Trent had 53,812 people aged under 16 (representing 20.4% of the total population) and 45,530 people aged 65+ (representing 17.3% of the total population).
Ethnicity	The largest ethnic group in Newcastle-under-Lyme in 2021 was White with 92.9% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 3.8% of the district's population.	The largest ethnic group in Staffs Moorlands in 2021 was White with 98.0% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Mixed race with 0.9% of the district's population. That compares with 1.7% for the county as a whole and 3.0% for West Midlands.	The largest ethnic group in Stoke-on-Trent in 2021 was White with 83.5% of the councils population. That compares with a figure of 77.0% for West Midlands region as a whole and 81.0% for England . The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 9.9% of the council's population
Households	In 2021 Newcastle-under-Lyme district had 53,423 households, which represent 14.24% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Newcastle-under-Lyme lives in Owns outright accommodation with 38.3% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 29.4% of the district's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Staffordshire Moorlands district had 42,355 households, which represent 11.29% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Staffs Moorlands lives in Owns outright accommodation with 48.2% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 30.1% of the district's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Stoke-on-Trent unitary had 110,399 households, which represent 4.54% of the 2,429,493 West Midlands region's households. The largest number of households in Stoke-on-Trent lives in Owns outright accommodation with 30.4% of households. That compares with 34.4% for West Midlands region as a whole and 32.5% for England. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 26.4% of the council's households. That compares with 28.4% for the region as a whole and 28.8% for England.
Employment	In Newcastle-under-Lyme the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 72.2% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.	In Staffordshire Moorlands the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 77.9% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.	In Stoke-on-Trent the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 73.9% compared to 73.9% in West Midlands and 75.7% in England.



	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Staffordshire Moorlands	Stoke-on-Trent
Education	28.05% of Newcastle-under-Lyme's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 20.05% of Newcastle-under-Lyme's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	28.38% of Staffordshire Moorlands' residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 20.06% of Staffordshire Moorlands' residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands	21.83% of Stoke-on-Trent's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 29.44% in West Midlands and 33.92% in England as a whole. 25.91% of Stoke-on-Trent's residents have no qualifications compared to 21.15% in West Midlands and 18.08% in England.
Health	In 2021 Newcastle-under-Lyme had 5,972 (4.8%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,741 (1.4%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 7 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Staffordshire Moorlands had 4,144 (4.3%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,262 (1.3%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 5 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Stoke-on-Trent had 14,546 (5.6%) residents that reported being in bad health and 4,466 (1.7%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 4 (out of 4 Unitary Councils) within West Midlands.



Demographic Information - Additional County Divisions

	Stone Urban County Division	Stone Rural North County Division	Uttoxeter Town County Division	Uttoxeter Rural County Division
Area	Area of 3 square miles (0.30% of the County)	Area of 35 square miles (3.41% of the County)	Area of 5 square miles (0.54% of the County)	Area of 56 square miles (5.57% of the County)
Residents	The resident population of Stone Urban in 2021 was 15,410. The predominant age band in Stone Urban in 2022 was 55 - 59 with 1,208 people out of the total population of 15,825. In 2022 Stone Urban had 2,736 people aged under 16 (representing 17.3% of the total population) and 3,760 people aged 65+ (representing 23.8% of the total population).	The resident population of Stone Rural North in 2021 was 15,295. The predominant age band in Stone Rural North in 2022 was 55 - 59 with 1,219 people out of the total population of 15,211. In 2022 Stone Rural North had 2,353 people aged under 16 (representing 15.5% of the total population) and 4,393 people aged 65+ (representing 28.9% of the total population).	The resident population of Uttoxeter Town in 2021 was 14,024 . The predominant age band in Uttoxeter Town in 2022 was 55 - 59 with 1,103 people out of the total population of 14,255. In 2022 Uttoxeter Town had 2,547 people aged under 16 (representing 17.9% of the total population) and 2,806 people aged 65+ (representing 19.7% of the total population).	The resident population of Uttoxeter Rural in 2021 was 11,626. The predominant age band in Uttoxeter Rural in 2022 was 50 - 54 with 964 people out of the total population of 11,536. In 2022 Uttoxeter Rural had 1,627 people aged under 16 (representing 14.1% of the total population) and 2,945 people aged 65+ (representing 25.5% of the total population).
Ethnicity	The largest ethnic group in Stone Urban in 2021 was White with 96.1% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Mixed race with 1.6% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with 1.7% for the county as a whole and 3.0% for West Midlands.	The largest ethnic group in Stone Rural North in 2021 was White with 96.2% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 1.6% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with 3.3% for the county as a whole and 13.3% for West Midlands.	The largest ethnic group in Uttoxeter Town in 2021 was White with 97.6% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Mixed race with 1.0% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with 1.7% for the county as a whole and 3.0% for West Midlands.	The largest ethnic group in Uttoxeter Rural in 2021 was White with 95.6% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 1.7% of the county electoral division's population. That compares with 3.3% for the county as a whole and 13.3% for West Midlands.



	Stone Urban County Division	Stone Rural North County Division	Uttoxeter Town County Division	Uttoxeter Rural County Division
Households	In 2021 Stone Urban county electoral division had 7,208 households, which represent 1.92% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Stone Urban lives in Owns outright accommodation with 38.7% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 30.6% of the county electoral division's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Stone Rural North county electoral division had 6,531 households, which represent 1.74% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Stone Rural North lives in Owns outright accommodation with 47.6% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 32.2% of the county electoral division's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Uttoxeter Town county electoral division had 6,003 households, which represent 1.60% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Uttoxeter Town lives in Owns outright accommodation with 37.4% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 33.1% of the county electoral division's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Uttoxeter Rural county electoral division had 3,819 households, which represent 1.02% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Uttoxeter Rural lives in Owns outright accommodation with 48.2% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 30.8% of the county electoral division's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.
Education	36.16% of Stone Urban's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 16.01% of Stone Urban's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	36.26% of Stone Rural North's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 15.85% of Stone Rural North's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	28.36% of Uttoxeter Town's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 19.16% of Uttoxeter Town's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	31.91% of Uttoxeter Rural's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 18.82% of Uttoxeter Rural's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.
Health	In 2021 Stone Urban had 608 (3.9%) residents that reported being in bad health and 180 (1.2%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 26 (out of 62 County Electoral Divisions) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Stone Rural North had 580 (3.8%) residents that reported being in bad health and 171 (1.1%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 21 (out of 62 County Electoral Divisions) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Uttoxeter Town had 510 (3.6%) residents that reported being in bad health and 150 (1.1%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 21 (out of 62 County Electoral Divisions) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Uttoxeter Rural had 359 (3.1%) residents that reported being in bad health and 104 (0.9%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 9 (out of 62 County Electoral Divisions) within Staffordshire.



Demographic Information – Additional Parish Wards

	Stone Rural Council Aston Ward ONS Output Area E00151504	Stone Town Council St Michael's East Ward ONS LSOA Stafford 004B
Area	Area of 4.2 square miles (0.41% of the County)	Area of 0.39 square miles (0.04% of the County)
Residents	The resident population in 2021 was 365.	The resident population of Stafford 004B in 2021 was 1,503. The predominant age band in Stafford 004B in 2022 was 55 - 59 with 151 people out of the total population of 1,462. In 2022 Stafford 004B had 276 people aged under 16 (representing 18.9% of the total population) and 338 people aged 65+ (representing 23.1% of the total population).
Ethnicity	The largest ethnic group in 2021 was White (92.6%). The second largest ethnic group was Asian with 3.6%.	The largest ethnic group in 2021 was White with 97.1% of the LSOA's population. The second largest ethnic group was Mixed race with 1.7% of the LSOA's population.
Households	Approximately 134 households. The largest number of households live in Owns outright accommodation with 48.9% of households. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan (30.1%).	In 2021 Stafford 004B LSOA had 599 households. The largest number of households live in Owns outright accommodation with 47.9% of households. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 41.1% of the LSOA's households.
Education	39.2 % of residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above. 12.9% of residents have no qualifications.	48.62% of Stafford 004B's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above. 7.33% of Stafford 004B's residents have no qualifications.
Health	Not available.	In 2021 Stafford 004B had 29 (1.9%) residents that reported being in bad health and 6 (0.4%) residents that reported being in very bad health.



Appendix A2

Demographic Information – Southern and Mid Staffordshire Local Authorities

Demographic Information – Southern and Mid Staffordshire Local Authorities

	Cannock Chase	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	South Staffordshire	Stafford	Tamworth
Area	Area of 30 square miles (3.01% of the County)	Area of 151 square miles (14.86% of the County)	Area of 128 square miles (12.63 of the County)	Area of 157 square miles (15.53% of the County)	Area of 231 square miles (22.80% of the County)	Area of 12 square miles (1.18% of the County)
Residents	The resident population of Cannock Chase in 2021 was 100,519 and is projected to be 104,653 by 2039. The predominant age band in Cannock Chase in 2024 was 55 - 59 with 7,789 people. In 2024 Cannock Chase had 18,352 people aged under 16 (representing 17.6% of the total population) and 20,826 people aged 65+ (representing 20.0% of the total population).	The resident population of East Staffordshire in 2021 was 124,020 and is projected to be 129,713 by 2039. The predominant age band in East Staffordshire in 2024 was 55 - 59 with 9,247 people. In 2024 East Staffordshire had 25,071 people aged under 16 (representing 19.3% of the total population) and 24,994 people aged 65+ (representing 19.3% of the total population)	The resident population of Lichfield in 2021 was 106,436 and is projected to be 110,825 by 2039. The predominant age band in Lichfield in 2024 was 55 - 59 with 8,308 people out of the total population of 111,932. In 2024 Lichfield had 18,705 people aged under 16 (representing 16.7% of the total population) and 26,887 people aged 65+ (representing 24.0% of the total population)	The resident population of South Staffordshire in 2021 was 110,472 and is projected to be 118,317 by 2039. The predominant age band in South Staffordshire in 2024 was 55 - 59 with 8,792 people out of the total population of 114,423.	The resident population of Stafford in 2021 was 136,867 and is projected to be 143,491 by 2039. In 2024 South Staffordshire had 17,906 people aged under 16 (representing 15.6% of the total population) and 29,567 people aged 65+ (representing 25.8% of the total population) The predominant age band in Stafford in 2024 was 55 - 59 with 10,545 people out of the total population of 141,556. In 2024 Stafford had 23,769 people aged under 16 (representing 16.8% of the total population) and 33,064 people aged 65+ (representing 23.4% of the total population)	The resident population of Tamworth in 2021 was 78,646 and is projected to be 79,674 by 2039. The predominant age band in Tamworth in 2024 was 30 - 34 with 6,126 people out of the total population of 81,117. In 2024 Tamworth had 15,203 people aged under 16 (representing 18.7% of the total population) and 15,682 people aged 65+ (representing 19.3% of the total population)
Ethnicity	The largest ethnic group in Cannock Chase in 2021 was White with 96.6% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands. The second largest ethnic group was Mixed race with 1.4% of the district's population.	The largest ethnic group in East Staffs in 2021 was White with 86.3% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands. The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 9.3% of the district's population.	The largest ethnic group in Lichfield in 2021 was White with 94.8% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands. The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 2.3% of the district's population.	The largest ethnic group in South Staffs in 2021 was White with 93.8% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands. The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 2.8% of the district's population.	The largest ethnic group in Stafford in 2021 was White with 93.4% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Asian or Asian British with 3.0% of the district's population.	The largest ethnic group in Tamworth in 2021 was White with 95.8% of the district's population. That compares with a figure of 93.6% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 77.0% for West Midlands . The second largest ethnic group was Mixed race with 1.9% of the district's population.



	Cannock Chase	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	South Staffordshire	Stafford	Tamworth
Households	In 2021 Cannock Chase district had 43,457 households, which represent 11.58% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Cannock Chase lives in Owns outright accommodation with 33.9% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 33.2% of the district's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 East Staffordshire district had 51,293 households, which represent 13.67% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in E Staffs lives in Owns outright accommodation with 36.4% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 30.4% of the district's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Lichfield district had 45,630 households, which represent 12.16% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Lichfield lives in Owns outright accommodation with 41.4% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 31.8% of the district's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 South Staffordshire district had 46,121 households, which represent 12.29% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in S Staffs lives in Owns outright accommodation with 44.0% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 30.5% of the district's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Stafford district had 60,047 households, which represent 16.00% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Stafford lives in Owns outright accommodation with 39.1% of households. That compares with 39.4% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 30.9% of the district's households. That compares with 31.1% for the county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands.	In 2021 Tamworth district had 32,895 households, which represent 8.77% of the 375,220 Staffordshire county's households. The largest number of households in Tamworth lives in Owns with a mortgage or loan accommodation with 33.7% of households. That compares with 31.1% for Staffordshire county as a whole and 28.4% for West Midlands. The second largest number of households lives in Owns outright accommodation with 33.3% of the district's households. That compares with 39.4% for the county as a whole and 34.4% for West Midlands.
Employment	In Cannock Chase the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 81.5% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.	In East Staffs the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 83.3% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.	In Lichfield the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 78.3% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.	In South Staffs the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 73.3% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.	In Stafford the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 76.3% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.	In Tamworth the Overall employment rate (aged 16-64) in 2025 Q1 (12 months ending) was 74.9% compared to 77.1% in Staffordshire and 73.9% in West Midlands.



	Cannock Chase	East Staffordshire	Lichfield	South Staffordshire	Stafford	Tamworth
Education	22.73% of Cannock Chase's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 21.99% of Cannock Chase's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	28.68% of East Staffordshire's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 20.13% of East Staffordshire's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	33.62% of Lichfield's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 17.05% of Lichfield's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	29.40% of South Staffordshire's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 19.29% of South Staffordshire's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	35.08% of Stafford's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 15.76% of Stafford's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.	21.87% of Tamworth's residents have achieved level 4 qualifications and above compared to 28.98% in Staffordshire and 29.44% in West Midlands as a whole. 21.79% of Tamworth's residents have no qualifications compared to 19.30% in Staffordshire and 21.15% in West Midlands.
Health	In 2021 Cannock Chase had 4,955 (4.9%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,485 (1.5%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 8 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 East Staffordshire had 4,637 (3.7%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,357 (1.1%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 1 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Lichfield had 4,162 (3.9%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,151 (1.1%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 1 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 South Staffordshire had 4,538 (4.1%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,327 (1.2%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 4 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Stafford had 5,203 (3.8%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,503 (1.1%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 1 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.	In 2021 Tamworth had 3,434 (4.4%) residents that reported being in bad health and 1,060 (1.3%) residents that reported being in very bad health. Its ranking for the number of residents in very bad health is 5 (out of 8 Districts) within Staffordshire.



Appendix B

Options Appraisal – Assessment of Options Against Criteria for Unitary Local Government

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

Local government reorganisation

Establishing a preferred option

**Assessment of shortlisted options against the criteria for
Unitary Local Government**

October 2025

Purpose of document

Background

The reforms outlined within the English Devolution White Paper will fundamentally change how public services are delivered.

District councils currently play a crucial place leadership role. Staffordshire Moorlands District Council ('SMDC' or 'the council') operates within a complex system of public, private and community organisations. It has developed extensive expertise and specialisms through its close connections with local residents, businesses, other public services and community organisations; through these connections the council possesses a deep understanding of specific local challenges and opportunities.

The ability of any new unitary council to ensure that the distinctiveness of their places is understood and retained within a new footprint serving a minimum of 500,000 residents is of critical importance. As such, proposals for reorganisation being developed across Staffordshire are required to demonstrate how local delivery capabilities, strong local connections and improvements to the quality and sustainability of public services will be secured and sustained.

Purpose

The council's Devolution & Local Government Reorganisation Sub Committee identified four shortlisted options for local government reorganisation across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in April 2025.

The Committee requested an objective and evidence-based options appraisal be undertaken to assess the performance of each option

against the following criteria, as identified by the Minister in the letter dated 5th February 2025:

- 1. The proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.
- 2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.
- 3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.
- 4. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.
- 5. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

This options appraisal assesses each shortlisted option against the above criteria and associated sub-criteria (see section 2). The appraisal is informed by a comprehensive place-based data set, making use of publicly available data and information provided by the council.

A further criterion was identified by the Minister; this criterion has not been considered during the options appraisal as it relates to the outputs from consultation and engagement exercises that will be undertaken by the council in the coming months:

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

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2. Overview of options
3. Appraisal criteria and scoring mechanism
4. Financial analysis of options
5. Option A - Place profile and option analysis
6. Option B - Place profile and option analysis
7. Option C - Place profile and option analysis
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10. Summary of findings and conclusions
11. Appendix A - LGR option maps

Section 1

Policy overview - Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

1. Overview - LGR and Devolution

Local Government Reorganisation

The [English Devolution White Paper](#) (published on 16th December 2024) sets out the government's vision for simpler local government structures. Alongside the publication of the White Paper, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote to all councils in remaining two-tier areas and neighbouring small unitaries to set out plans for a joint programme of devolution and LGR. This joint programme of reform is designed to:

- Decentralise power from Westminster to local and regional authorities.
- Simplify local government structures by replacing two-tier systems with unitary authorities;
- Establish new combined authorities with devolved powers in areas like transport, housing, and skills.

The reforms outlined within the English Devolution White Paper will fundamentally change how public services are delivered across the current two-tier area of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Staffordshire County Council, Stoke City Council and the eight borough / district councils will cease to exist once the LGR programme has been completed. They will be replaced by new unitary councils that are responsible for the delivery of services and functions previously delivered by the county, city and borough/district councils across the current two tier footprint.

National reforms - Several other areas of national policy and reform will have a direct impact on local government and communities in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent in the future, including:

- **Fit for the Future 10 year Health Plan for England** - The [10-Year Health Plan \(2025-2035\)](#) introduces a transformative model for the NHS in England, centred around the creation of a neighbourhood health service. This initiative is designed to shift care from hospitals to communities, making care more preventative, personalised, and localised.

The neighbourhood health service is a new model of care that will:

- Bring NHS services closer to home, especially for people with complex or long-term conditions.
- Focus on preventative care, aiming to keep people well and reduce hospital admissions.
- Integrate GPs, nurses, social workers, home carers, pharmacists, and voluntary sector partners into multi-professional neighbourhood teams.
- **Planning reform** - The Planning and Infrastructure Bill (2025) will result in a significant increase in the target for new homes across Staffordshire and Stoke. The future role of the strategic authority, which would lead on housing delivery and take on planning powers, will shape the future planning and housing supply functions of the new unitary council.
- **Fair Funding Formula** - The Fair Funding Review 2.0 consultation, launched in 2025, outlines a major overhaul of how central government allocates funding to local authorities in England and

1. Overview - LGR and Devolution

is anticipated to shape the Local Government Finance Settlement from 2026-27 onwards. The proposed new funding allocation formulae would introduce new Relative Needs Formulas for adult social care, children's services, fire and rescue, highways maintenance and be adjusted for areas cost differences (rurality etc.).

Areas such as Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent that are undergoing LGR and/or forming strategic authorities are expected to benefit from tailored funding models, while it is also anticipated that funding allocations will include a shift from crisis response to prevention (specifically in relation to adult social care and children's services).

- **Neighbourhood governance** - The English Devolution & Community Empowerment Bill will place a new duty for all local authorities to establish effective neighbourhood governance structures. These reforms are designed to:
 - Empower councillors to take a more active role in addressing local issues.
 - Move decision-making closer to residents, ensuring that local voices are heard and acted upon.
 - Create formal mechanisms for neighbourhoods to influence local priorities, budgets, and service delivery.

The structures that deliver the above requirements will vary from place to place, however potential structures are anticipated to include neighbourhood area committees, community assemblies, participatory budgeting panels and / or Local Partnership Boards.

- **Local Government Outcomes Framework ('LGOF')** - Launched by [MHCLG for consultation in July 2025](#), the LGOF is a major reform initiative designed to shift local government accountability from input-based models to a more outcomes-focussed approach. Once implemented, the LGOF is designed to:
 - Clarify national priorities for local government.
 - Empower councils with greater autonomy and flexibility.
 - Reduce burdensome reporting and ringfenced funding.
 - Support strategic, long-term planning and innovation at the local level.

The framework identifies 15 priority outcomes areas, including:

- Housing.
- Homelessness and rough sleeping.
- Multiple disadvantage (adults).
- Best start in life.
- Every child achieving and thriving.
- Keeping children safe and family security (children's social care).
- Health and wellbeing.
- Adult social care - Quality.
- Adult social care - Independence.
- Adult social care - Neighbourhood health / integration.
- Neighbourhoods.
- Environment, circular economy and climate change.

1. Overview - LGR and Devolution

- Transport and infrastructure.
- Economic prosperity and regeneration.

Following consultation, it is anticipated that the final framework will be subject to phased implementation and refinements from 2026 onwards. As such, any new unitary council(s) established across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent would be required to deliver against these priorities.

Devolution - the future role of the strategic authority/authorities

In addition to implementing LGR for all remaining two-tier areas, the White Paper commits to ensuring that all regions of England are covered by a strategic authority. These strategic authorities will be responsible for coordinating and delivering a wide range of public services and development initiatives across its area in partnership with councils, including (not an exhaustive list):

- Transport and infrastructure
 - Developing and managing regional transport strategies.
 - Overseeing public transport networks, road improvements, and active travel (cycling/walking).
 - Coordinating infrastructure investment and planning.
- Housing and strategic planning
 - Leading on housing delivery, including affordable housing targets.
 - Managing spatial planning and land use across the region.
 - Aligning housing with transport and economic growth priorities.
- Skills and employment
 - Shaping local skills strategies in partnership with employers and education providers.
 - Overseeing adult education and vocational training.
 - Supporting job creation and workforce development.
- Economic development
 - Driving inward investment and business support.
 - Coordinating innovation, enterprise zones, and regeneration projects.
 - Promoting regional economic strategies aligned with national goals.
- Environment and climate change
 - Leading on regional net-zero strategies and climate resilience.
 - Coordinating energy planning, including renewables and grid upgrades.
 - Leading on green infrastructure and biodiversity initiatives.
- Health, wellbeing and public service reform
 - Integrating health and social care services with local government.
 - Tackling health inequalities and improving population health.
 - Reforming public services to be more efficient and community focussed.

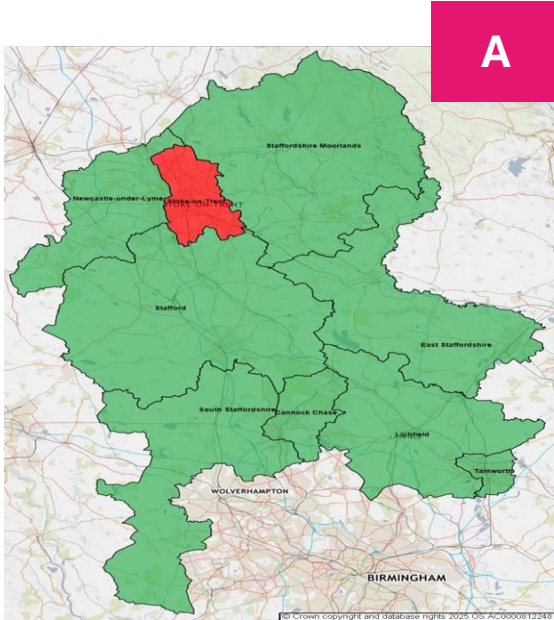
1. Overview - LGR and Devolution

- Public safety and resilience
 - Coordinating emergency planning and civil resilience.
 - Working with police and fire services on regional safety strategies.
- Convening and collaboration
 - Bringing together councils, businesses, universities, and the voluntary sector.
 - Representing the region in national and international forums.

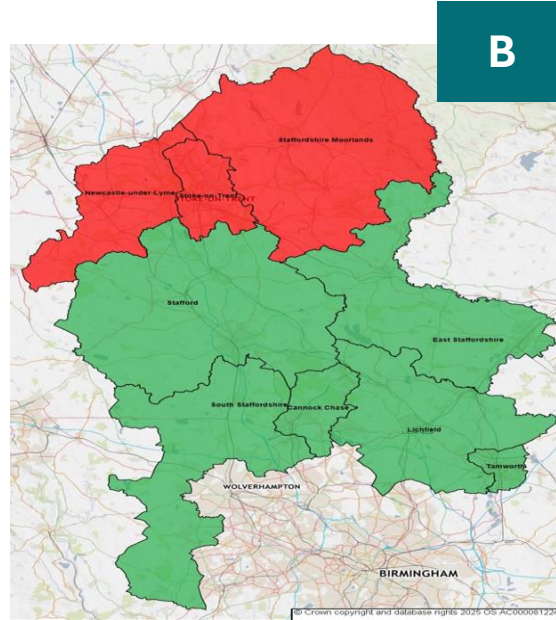
Section 2

Overview of options

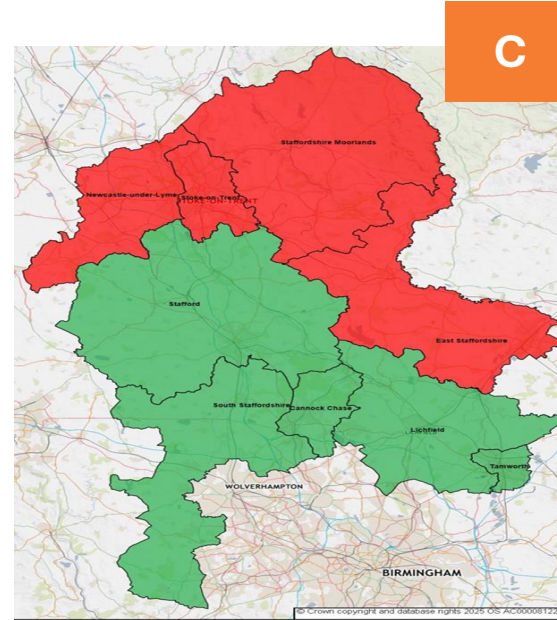
2. Overview of options



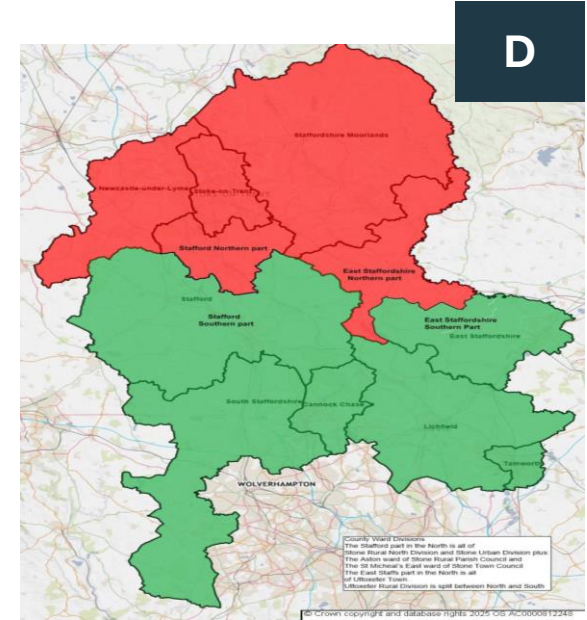
Staffordshire
 Cannock Chase
 East Staffordshire
 Lichfield
 Newcastle-under-Lyme
 South Staffordshire
 Stafford
 Staffordshire Moorlands
 Tamworth
Stoke-on-Trent (unchanged)



North Staffordshire
 Newcastle-under-Lyme
 Staffordshire Moorlands
 Stoke-on-Trent
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
 Cannock Chase
 East Staffordshire
 Lichfield
 South Staffordshire
 Stafford
 Tamworth

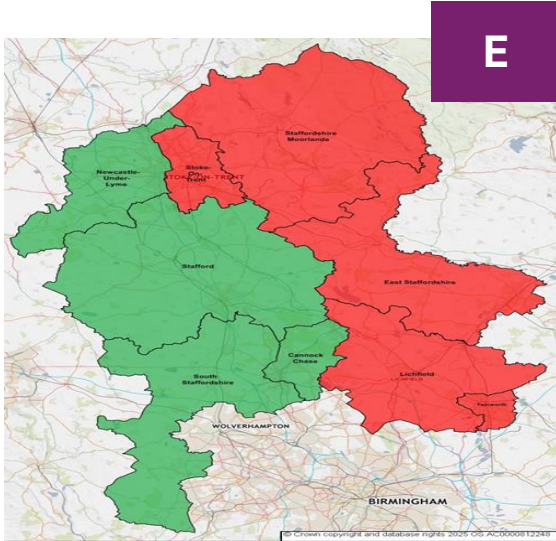


North Staffordshire
 East Staffordshire
 Newcastle-under-Lyme
 Staffordshire Moorlands
 Stoke-on-Trent
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
 Cannock Chase
 Lichfield
 South Staffordshire
 Stafford
 Tamworth



North Staffordshire
 East Staffordshire (Part)
 Newcastle-under-Lyme
 Stafford (Part)
 Staffordshire Moorlands
 Stoke-on-Trent
Southern and Mid-Staffordshire
 East Staffordshire (Part)
 Cannock Chase
 Lichfield
 South Staffordshire
 Stafford (Part)
 Tamworth

2. Overview of options



West Staffordshire

Cannock Chase
Newcastle-Under-Lyme
South Staffordshire
Stafford

East Staffordshire

East Staffordshire
Lichfield
Staffordshire Moorlands
Stoke-on-Trent
Tamworth

Section 3

Appraisal criteria and scoring mechanism

3. Appraisal criteria and scoring mechanism

Appraisal criteria

This appraisal assesses the performance of each shortlisted option against the criteria identified by the Minister in the letter dated 5th February 2025. The main criteria are informed by numerous sub-criteria, as outlined below:

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

Sensible geography:

- Proposed unitary councils meet the 500,000 population guiding principle or provide a compelling case for an exemption.
- Proposals ensure effective democratic representation for all parts of the area.
- Proposals reflect issues of local identity, culture and historic importance.
- Proposals should demonstrate how they will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.

Sensible economic area:

- Proposals should be for sensible economic areas:
 - With an appropriate tax base.
 - That does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.

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

- Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks.
- Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies.
- For areas covering councils that are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing.

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

- Improved service delivery and avoidance of unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- Identified opportunities to deliver public service reform, including where they will lead to better value for money.

4. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- Only main criteria, no sub-criteria.

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

- Only main criteria, no sub-criteria.

3. Appraisal criteria and scoring mechanism

Assessing performance against appraisal criteria

A defined scoring mechanisms has been used to appraise the performance of each option:

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

- Met
- Partially met
- Not met

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

- Met
- Partially met
- Not met

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

- Met
- Partially met
- Not met

4. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- Met
- Partially met
- Not met

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

- Met
- Partially met
- Not met

Weighting of appraisal criteria

The appraisal has not applied any weighting to the main or sub-criteria. Each criterion has been appraised on an equal footing, recognising the importance of each, and given that the Minister has given no formal steer on the most important factors.

3. Appraisal criteria and scoring mechanism

Demographic and economic profile - assessing performance and variance

A demographic and economic profile of each option has been developed, designed to:

- Demonstrate the current baselined performance for SMDC and the whole two-tier area against selected indicators.
- Demonstrate how each new unitary council within an option would perform against selected indicators.
- Provide the basis for analysis, in terms of forecasted variances across the demographic and economic profiles of each proposed new unitary councils.

A red/amber/green status has been applied to the performance of the new Staffordshire/North Staffordshire unitary council option for selected indicators. This is designed to demonstrate:

GREEN: The new unitary council that includes SMDC demonstrates **improved** performance against a specific measure, when compared to SMDC's current performance.

AMBER: The new unitary council that includes SMDC demonstrates a **similar level** of performance against a specific measure, when compared to SMDC's current performance.

RED: The new unitary council that includes SMDC demonstrates a **worse** performance against a specific measure, when compared to SMDC's current performance.

Section 4

Financial analysis of options

4. Financial analysis - overview of two-tier area (CIPFA 2023/24)

Metric	Staff Moorlands DC	Cannock Chase DC	East Staffs BC	Lichfield DC	NuL B&DC	South Staffs DC	Stafford BC	Tamworth BC	SoT City Council	Staffs CC
Level of reserves / Council net expenditure <i>Ratio of the current level of reserves (total useable excluding public health & schools) to a council's net revenue expenditure</i> Guide: Higher ratio value is preferred in terms of measuring sustainability	68.1	153.3*	100	100	32.3	76.53	256.5*	100	23	73.9
Gross external debt <i>Gross external debt held by council(s)</i>	£7.6m	£81.6m*	£6.4m	£1m	0	£15m	£1.4m	£63.1m	£775m	£508.4m
Fees and charges to service expenditure ratio <i>Proportion of fees and charges against a council's total service expenditure</i> Guide: A higher % is preferred in terms of demonstrating revenue realising capacity/capabilities	21%	9.9%*	18%	28.35	19.1%	23.9%	25.9%*	11.7%	14%	13.2%

* = 2023/24 values not available; 2022/23 values used instead

Source: CIPFA Financial Resilience Index (2023/24) <https://www.cipfa.org/services/financial-resilience-index/resilience-index>

4. Financial analysis - overview of two-tier area (Council RA returns)

Metric	Staff Moorlands DC	Cannock Chase DC	East Staffs BC	Lichfield DC	NuL B&DC	South Staffs DC	Stafford BC	Tamworth BC	SoT City Council	Staffs CC
Total general reserves <i>Including: general, schools & earmarked reserved, unusable capital receipts and unapplied capital grants</i> <i>Excluding HRA borrowing, reserves and investments</i>	£13.4m	£37.3m	£35.9m	£26m	£8.8m	£21.6m	£51.6m	£46.1m	£144.6m	£552.4m
Total borrowing <i>Total long and short-term borrowing</i>	£7.7m	£81.9m	£6.5m	£1m	£0.05m	£15m	£0m	£63.4m	£723.8m	£389.1m
Council General Fund expenditure <i>Excluding annual HRA surplus / deficit (if applicable)</i>	£13.1m	£16.9m	£17m	£16.6m	£17.4m	£21.3m	£17.3m	£11.2m	£483.4m	£1,166.7m

Source: Council RA returns for 2023/24 and 2024/25

4. Financial analysis of options (Council RA returns)

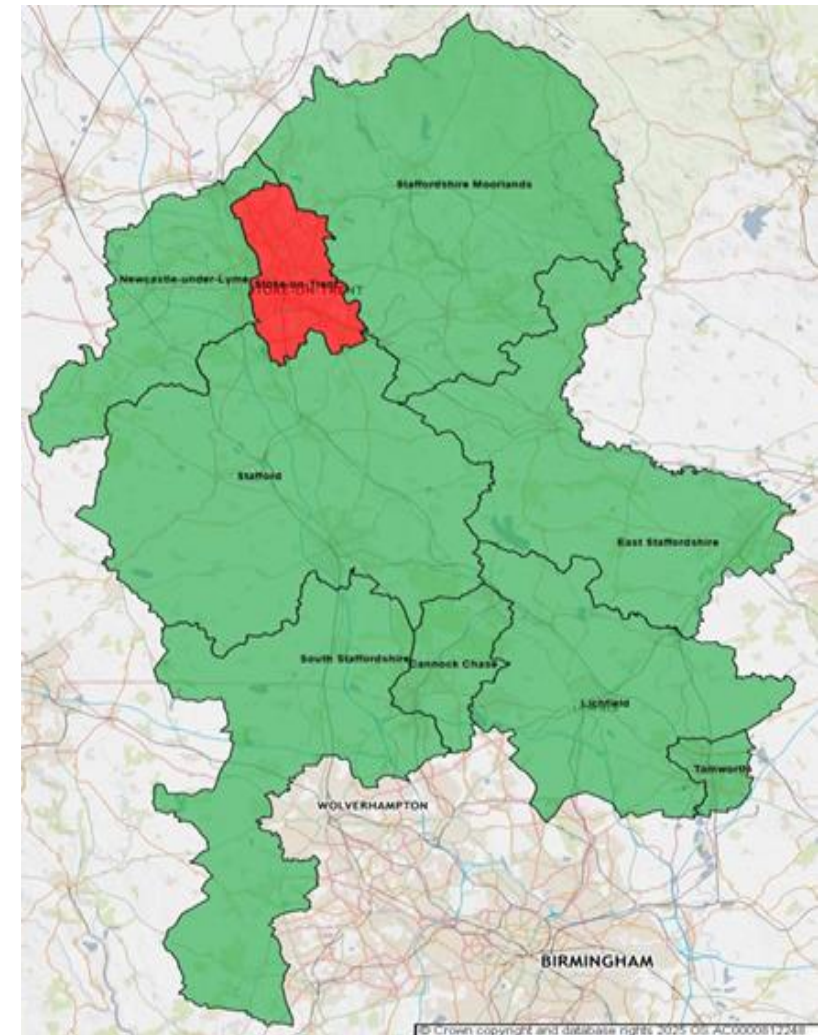
Metric	SMDC	SCC	Option A	Options B & D	Option C	Option E
Total general reserves <i>Including: general, schools & earmarked reserved, unusable capital receipts and unapplied capital grants</i> <i>Excluding HRA borrowing, reserves and investments</i>	£13.4m	£552.m	Staffordshire new unitary = £793.2m Stoke new unitary = £144.6m	North Staffordshire new unitary = £305m Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary = £632.7m	North Staffordshire new unitary = £419.1m Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary = £518.6m	West Staffordshire new unitary = £348.7m East Staffordshire new unitary = £589m
Council General Fund expenditure <i>Excluding annual HRA surplus / deficit (if applicable)</i>	£13.1m	£1166.7m	Staffordshire new unitary = £1297.5m Stoke new unitary = £483.4m	North Staffordshire new unitary = £805.8m Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary = £975.2m	North Staffordshire new unitary = £987.9m Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary = £793m	West Staffordshire new unitary = £557.5m East Staffordshire new unitary = £1,223.4m
Borrowing as a proportion of reserves <i>Total borrowing as a proportion of general fund reserves</i> Guide: Lower ratio value is preferred in terms of measuring sustainability	57%	138%	Staffordshire new unitary = 71% Stoke new unitary = 500%	North Staffordshire new unitary = 272% Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary = 72%	North Staffordshire new unitary = 212% Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary = 77%	West Staffordshire new unitary = 74.1% East Staffordshire new unitary = 174.8%

Section 5

Option A - Place profile and option analysis

5. Option A - Place profile and option analysis

Key	Proposed new unitary council	Area (km2)	Current population (2021)	Combined no. of Councillors
	Staffordshire Cannock Chase East Staffordshire Lichfield Newcastle-under-Lyme South Staffordshire Stafford Staffordshire Moorlands Tamworth	2,620	876,134	62
	Stoke-on-Trent (unchanged)	93	258,375	44



5. Option A - Demographic and economic profile

DEMOGRAPHIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option A		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		Staffs	Stoke on Trent	
Demographics				
Area (km2)	576	2,620	93	2,713
Population	95,851	876,134	258,375	1,134,509
Age 0-15	15.6%	17.1%	20.3%	17.8%
Age 16-64	58.2%	60.8%	62.6%	61.2%
Age 65+	26.2%	22.2%	17.1%	21.0%
Population density (km2)	166	334	2,778	418
Index of Multiple Deprivation ('IMD')				
Health	6	6	2	IMD is a 10-point ranking system, A decile of 1 is the most deprived, and 10 is the least deprived
Skills	5	5	3	
Employ.	6	6	3	
Income	7	6	4	
Crime	8	7	4	
Housing	6	7	7	
Living env.	6	6	5	

ECONOMIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option A		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		Staffs	Stoke on Trent	
Economy				
Council Tax Base	34,382	300,707	68,850	369,557
GVA per hour	£29.20	£34.03	£32.40	£33.84
Gross median pay	£732.10	£718.04	£608.80	£705.90
Employmt. rate (16-64)	80.7%	78.5%	72.3%	77.8%
Economic activity (16-64)	82.8%	80.9%	74.2%	80.1%
% pop - Level 3 skills	53.6%	61.9%	62.3%	61.9%
% pop - Level 4 skills	32.8%	39.7%	44.1%	40.2%
% of low paid jobs	28.6%	22.2%	18.8%	21.9%
% of residents who travel less than 10km to work	10.3%	11.7%	18.4%	12.4%
% of residents who travel more than 10km to work	5.9%	5.1%	2.9%	4.8%
Housing target (up to 2035)	454	5,214	445	5,659
Employment land*	17.1ha	539.6ha	128.7ha	668.3ha

*Designated or available employment land as set out in each area's Local Plan or Availability Assessment

5. Option A - Current democratic profile

	Population (2021)	Electorate	No. of County Councillors	Electorate per County Councillor	No. of Town and Parish Councils
STAFFORDSHIRE	876,134	667,841	62	10,772	195
Cannock Chase District Council	100,529	76,864	7	10,981	8
East Staffordshire Borough Council	124,019	90,657	9	10,073	38
Lichfield District Council	106,439	82,671	8	10,334	29
Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council	123,306	92,911	9	10,323	10
South Staffordshire District Council	110,474	85,917	8	10,740	27
Stafford Borough Council	136,870	102,215	9	11,357	40
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	95,851	77,056	7	11,008	43
Tamworth Borough Council	78,646	59,550	5	11,910	0
STOKE-ON-TRENT	258,375	197,984	44	4,500	0
Stoke City Council	258,375	197,984	44	4,500	0

Population of new unitary councils

Option A would result in two unitary councils operating across the existing two-tier footprint. Both unitary councils would retain their current and recognised boundaries, supporting the continuation of cooperation with other public sector organisations (ICB/ICS, Police and Crime Commissioner etc.).

The new Staffordshire unitary would have a population of c876,000, while the Stoke-on-Trent unitary would have a population of c258,000.

- **Criterion: Proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government: Met**
- **Criterion: Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000: Not met**

Case for exemption from 500,000 population requirement for new unitary authorities

The configuration of both new unitaries reflects their varying demographic and economic profiles. While the new Staffordshire unitary would cover 2,600 km² and have a population density of 715 residents per km², the Stoke unitary covers 93 km² and would have a far higher population density of 2,765 residents per km².

This contrast demonstrates the rural/urban nature of Staffordshire unitary council's population, which would require a different public service

delivery model to that of Stoke unitary council's population, with the majority of residents living in an urban setting.

Additionally, the establishment of two separate unitary authorities avoids the requirement to aggregate (for example) two separate social care services (given the complexities associated with service redesign, harmonisation of employment terms/conditions, aligning IT systems etc.). However, not aggregating these services would limit the ability of both new unitary councils to realise efficiencies; given that social care spend currently constitutes c75% of unitary council spend per annum, no aggregation of services limits the scope of efficiencies that could be achieved through local government reorganisation.

From an economic perspective, both new unitary authorities would possess similar GVA per hour (Staffs: £34.03, Stoke: £32.40). The proportionate tax base per resident is similar across both unitaries. Although disparities would exist between the unitary council populations in relation to economic activity, skills and low paid jobs, the systemic and place-based challenges creating these disparities would be priorities each new unitary council would share (i) with each other and (ii) with the Staffordshire Strategic Authority (once established).

Staffordshire's various councils and Stoke City Council have a long tradition of working effectively together in the best interests of residents and businesses. Option A would enable these partnership to continue, with the support of the anticipated Strategic Authority.

Democratic representation

A crucial element in any LGR submission is consideration of effective arrangements for democratic representation in the new unitary councils. The Electoral Commission has published guidance on planning for devolution and local government reorganisation which confirms that it is expected that appropriate warding arrangements will be set out in the structural changes order for the new unitary councils.

However, the Local Government Boundary Commission for England ('LGBCE'), which is responsible for undertaking reviews of local authority boundaries, has confirmed that it will not be able to do so on any authority before it has vested. As such, any electoral arrangements will be required to be based on existing ward boundaries (at parish, district or county level); boundaries will have been the subject of a review by the LGBCE previously. The LGBCE has also indicated in further guidance that they would expect no LGR proposals to contain fewer than 30, nor more than 99, councillors. Each of the four options is therefore considered below against these criteria and the overriding objectives of the LGBCE which are:

- To provide electoral arrangements for English principal local authorities that are fair and deliver electoral equality for voters.
- To keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with principal local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.

Option A: This option would leave the current SOTCC wards/councillors untouched and therefore be based on the existing County Council Electoral Division boundaries for the remainder of the county.

To reflect the current geographical size of the Divisions, and the increase in responsibilities which elected members would have (i.e. with the addition of district functions), it is difficult to support retaining the existing single member 62 Divisions as being sustainable, while providing effective and convenient local government to residents. However, increasing the number of councillors, by creating multi-member Divisions, will then significantly breach the LGBCE's upper limit of 99 councillors. Without a formal review of boundaries it is not clear how this option could be progressed easily in terms of electoral representation.

- **Criterion: Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area: Not met**

Local identity, culture and heritage

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent share a deep and intertwined cultural identity rooted in their industrial heritage, creative traditions, and community values.

Councils across Staffordshire are already committed to joint working, ensuring better connections that bring together diverse communities and vibrant culture sector without taking away from the unique identities of towns, villages and communities. Additionally, there already exists a commitment to strengthen working relationships with neighbouring councils, including Stoke City Council, to enhance opportunities for cultural and economic collaboration.

These shared strategic ambitions and existing delivery structures provide the basis for each unitary council to promote the local identity, culture and heritage of their respective populations, which would continue to involve collaborative working to benefit the sub-region's visitor economy, arts and creative sectors etc.

Both new unitary councils would benefit from the extensive existing network of Town and Parish Councils that would support ongoing working with communities, voluntary and community groups etc. to maintain the special characteristics of their localities. These arrangements however only exist across Staffordshire and not Stoke.

However, specifically in relation to the proposed new Staffordshire unitary council, the council footprint consists of a diverse range of communities, third sector organisations and businesses.

Communities across the north of the county possess a rich and distinctive local identity shaped by the area's industrial heritage, cultural traditions and a strong sense of community pride. Coal mining, ceramics, steelworks and canal transport have shaped the region's economy and landscape.

Communities across mid and southern Staffordshire hold a distinct identity shaped by historic towns, royal connections, religious heritage and civic pride, distinct from the industrial character of North Staffordshire. Towns maintain strong local identities, often expressed through independent businesses, historic markets and community-led regeneration.

As such, while Staffordshire and Stoke share history and regional identity, the diverse mix of communities and identities at a local level would require a new Staffordshire unitary council to establish specific structures/arrangements to ensure that local individuality and identity would be recognised across a population of c876,000 residents.

Criterion: Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance: Not met

Housing supply

Staffordshire County Council does not produce a Local Plan. Instead, housing planning and delivery responsibilities lie with the district and borough councils within the county.

Staffordshire Moorlands does not form a self-contained housing market area and cross-boundary relationships are shared with Stoke-on-Trent in particular. Growth in housing is essential to ensure that Staffordshire Moorlands maintains sustainable communities. SMDC's Local Plan which was adopted in 2020, provides the planning framework to enable the provision for an additional 6,080 homes by 2033 and allocates 32 ha. of land for new employment uses.

The delivery of new housing and employment against the Local Plan targets has been slow. This position has been worsened by the revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in December 2024.

The formula that determines the future housing requirement sees the council having new minimum housing figures significantly in excess of both past delivery and past projections of likely household numbers. The new Local Plan will need to address both the larger housing requirement (454 units up from 320) and the under-delivery of both housing and employment over the current Local Plan period to date.

A unified, Staffordshire wide approach to housing supply and development would assist in delivering against the new unitary council's

target of 5,214 homes. Additionally, a unified approach to investment, involving private developers, infrastructure providers and Government (including through nationally significant infrastructure projects such as High Speed 2), would result in a more co-ordinated approach to meeting housing and infrastructure requirements across Staffordshire.

This aligns with SMDC's current approach to working with neighbouring authorities to create a complementary offer, taking a sub-regional approach to ensuring housing supply.

- **Criterion: Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply: Met**

5. Option A

Sensible economic area

Sectoral analysis

Staffordshire

Over the past decade the Staffordshire economy has evolved from one predominately focussed on lower value manufacturing and construction industries. The economy is now more diverse with significant strengths in automotive (Jaguar Land Rover, Gestamp), aerospace (Moog), energy (General Electric, ABB), medical technologies (Cobra Biologics, Biocomposites), construction (JCB, KMF), logistics (Amazon, DHL) and digital (Risual).

The majority of local businesses are SMEs; supporting their growth and enabling people to start and grow their own business remains a shared priority across Staffordshire.

Innovation and knowledge driven sectors are strengthening across the county; innovation projects delivered by Keele University include the Smart Energy Network Demonstrator, the HyDeploy project to trial injecting hydrogen into the gas network. The Staffordshire Digital Innovation Partnership is advancing growth through digital innovation, the Staffordshire Intelligent Mobility Innovation Accelerator supports SME innovation in transport, logistics and mobility markets, and the Centre for Health Innovation investment provides leading edge immersion and simulation facilities.

Staffordshire Moorlands

Specifically within Staffordshire Moorlands, there are a number of large nationally recognised employers, however the local economy is dominated by micro and small businesses which collectively accounts for over 92% of all businesses.

Staffordshire Moorlands has a low proportion of enterprises in knowledge driven sectors. The visitor economy is key to the economic prosperity of the Staffordshire Moorlands, employing 5,049 people. The district attracted 5.9m visitors per annum, exceeding pre-pandemic levels. The visitor economy currently contributed c£540m to the local economy in 2023, an increase of 8.4% on the previous year.

Stoke-on-Trent

Stoke-on-Trent is the primary city economy and driver of employment and economic growth in and around Staffordshire, and the largest city between the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and East Midlands conurbations. The city has transitioned from a traditional manufacturing base to a more diversified economy. Key sectors include advanced manufacturing, digital technology, and creative industries. Despite this diversification, the city faces challenges such as health-related unemployment, lower educational attainment, and economic inactivity.

The majority of local businesses are SMEs; large local employers include Bet365, JCB, Michelin Tyres and Steelite.

5. Option A

Sensible economic area

Employment sites

Staffordshire

The county council has prioritised the unlocking of strategic employment sites to support economic growth, create jobs and raise skills levels. Their Strategic Infrastructure Plan outlines the level of growth planned within the county over the next 20 years, amounting to over 80,000 houses and significant levels of employment land. A specific focus is on the delivery of high-quality housing and employment sites across the A50 / A500 and A38 corridors corridors.

Staffordshire Moorlands

The development of new employment sites in the Staffordshire Moorlands has been negligible over the current local plan period to date with just 3.28 Ha. recorded over the first 9 years of the plan period, representing less than 2 years' worth of intended supply (annual target 1.68 Ha).

The council's new Local Plan will be required to address both the larger housing requirement and the under delivery of both housing and employment over the current local plan period to date. Linked to the council's commitment to support small businesses to grow, establishing new employment sites is an ongoing priority that is closely linked to the growth of the local and regional economy.

Stoke-on-Trent

The council is committed to identifying new employment sites that will support the creation of more high-value jobs in the city, and attracting the employers who can deliver them. This is part of a wider strategy overseeing the development of transport infrastructure, creation of new employment sites and improving the physical appearance of urban areas.

5. Option A

Sensible economic area

Investment in transport

Transport in Staffordshire is primarily the responsibility of Staffordshire County Council. The council oversees a wide range of transport-related services including public transport planning, road maintenance and improvement projects, sustainable and active travel initiatives and transport planning and strategy (including the Staffordshire Local Transport Plan).

The statutory responsibility for transport in Stoke-on-Trent lies with Stoke-on-Trent City Council, which acts as the Local Transport Authority for the city.

Each district/borough council has its own Integrated Transport Strategy to address local challenges and opportunities.

A regional approach to transport (Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent)

The Joint Strategic Transport Statement (February 2025) articulates several shared priorities and areas of current/intended collaboration. The statement recognises the high level of movement between Stoke-on-Trent and surrounding Staffordshire areas and a commitment to pan-Staffordshire transport planning, including:

- Improving public transport, including a joined-up approach to bus patronage and establishing a regional integrated public transport ticketing and information system.

- A commitment to increasing rail capacity and improved local and longer distance services for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, enabling modal shift from road to rail and network resilience.
- Road network resilience, efficiency and safety.
- Encouraging walking, wheeling and cycling as part of an approach to promote active travel and health.
- The decarbonisation and the development of a net-zero transport network
- Leveraging new technologies to improve access to digital connectivity, reduce congestion through traffic management and improve the transport user experience.

Staffordshire

Through their responsibilities for highways, the county council has a vital role in enabling people to access Staffordshire's towns and local centres safely and reliably. Several key transformational projects are currently being delivered that will form a vital part of the county's future, including the A50 / A500 and A38 corridors.

Additionally, the county council is unlocking investment in road, rail, and digital connectivity across the corridors, including the restoration and reopening of rail stations and delivery of sustainable transport improvements between transport hubs and places where people live and work.

5. Option A

Sensible economic area

Stoke-on-Trent

The city council has prioritised the boosting of intra-city connectivity, as well as commuter infrastructure, through major improvements to the quality, coverage and affordability of public transport and active travel networks.

This involves developing and implementing plans for transport services and infrastructure which reflect economic needs, support local daytime and night-time economies, boost connectivity and enhance passenger experience.

Staffordshire Moorlands

The council is currently working closely with the county council to ensure the coordination of proposals within the Growth Strategy and delivery of priorities within the Integrated Transport Strategy. The council is also working closely with Stoke-on-Trent City Council with regards to public transport requirements, given the strong 'cross-border' workforce links and travel to work patterns.

5. Option A

Sensible economic area

Live and work patterns

According to Census 2021 data, almost half (49.4%) of Staffordshire's residents travelled less than 20km to work, higher than national counterparts (45.8%) but lower than the LEP area at 52.3%. Although a much smaller proportion, compared to the national average, more Staffordshire residents were likely to travel longer distances to their workplace, with 11.0% travelling 20km or further compared with 8.3% across England. This trend was also seen across all districts/boroughs, with the exception of Newcastle-under-Lyme, where only 7.4% of residents travelled more than 20km.

Stoke-on-Trent is a major employment hub within the region. There are strong 'cross-border' workforce links with the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation (about 15.4% of daily work-journeys into the Staffordshire Moorlands are from the conurbation, while 26.8% of the Moorlands resident workforce work in the conurbation).

The 2011 Census indicated c6,000-8,000 Staffordshire residents commuted to Birmingham for work, while c2,000-5,000 residents travel to Manchester.

No publicly available data have been identified to quantify the proportion of income earned by Staffordshire residents that is spent within the county. However, informed assumptions can be made based on economic and behavioural indicators:

- Capturing of local spend is likely to be highest in categories including housing, groceries, and transport, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas.
- Retail leakage is likely to be high in relation to higher-end retail, entertainment, and professional services, particularly to Birmingham, Manchester, or Stoke-on-Trent.
- A significant proportion of leisure spending will likely be spent locally due to Staffordshire's strong visitor economy (e.g. Alton Towers, Cannock Chase, The Potteries).

These assumptions align with findings included with South Staffordshire Council's 'South Staffordshire Retail Centres Study', April 2021: *'The extensive NEMS survey and our subsequent analysis of the data relating to South Staffordshire, demonstrated that there is a very high leakage of expenditure on convenience goods and an even higher one of comparison goods expenditure to shopping facilities outside the District'*.

In relation to Option A, the creation of a new Staffordshire unitary council is unlikely to prevent a continuation of retail leakage to large cities. However, the new unitary council would be well placed to align economic development, transport, planning, and tourism strategies across the entire county, increasing the ability to retain local consumer spending. Additionally, improved access to integrated data on footfall, spending and demographics across the new unitary council would enable targeted interventions (i.e. retail incentives, events) to catalyse local spending.

5. Option A

Sensible economic area

Summary analysis

A new Staffordshire unitary council (Option A), in conjunction with emerging devolution arrangements, would support the current two-tier area to:

- Continue to reorientate the regional economy by attracting and retain businesses based in the area.
- Attract and retain entrepreneurs and skilled workers (linked to the potential growth of hybrid / remote working) to the area.
- Develop, retain and support a higher skilled, higher paid workforce, reducing economic inactivity rates and increasing the number of people with Level 3 and 4 qualifications.
- Support business expansion through innovative land use allocations across Staffordshire.
- Attract more day and staying visitors by strengthening Staffordshire's offer as a visitor destination.
- Continue to improve the vitality and viability of town centres through a county-wide approach to place-making investment.
- Establish a Staffordshire wide spatial strategy to reflect the growth potential of the area.
- Align economic development, transport, planning, and tourism strategies across the entire county, increasing the ability to attract and retain local consumer spend.

- Agree a unified, Staffordshire wide approach to housing supply and development would assist in delivering against the new unitary council's target of 5,214 homes.
- Maintain strong collaborative links with the Stoke-on-Trent economy, given the strong 'cross-border' supply chains, workforce links and travel to work patterns.

However, evidence clearly demonstrates that there are two separate economies operating in Staffordshire i.e. Northern Staffordshire and Southern Staffordshire:

- Economic data demonstrates that North Staffordshire is a cohesive economic geography which has formed around the economic needs and activities created within Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, the market towns of the Staffordshire Moorlands and other smaller settlements. The geography is also aligned to housing market areas.
- The local authority areas in the south of the county have strong links with the West Midlands conurbation, including high levels of in/out commuting, and high levels of visitor flows for retail and leisure opportunities. Four of the six councils co-founded the GBSLEP and some are non-constituent members of the WMCA.

Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas: Partially met

5. Option A

Sensible economic area

Appropriate tax base

The tax base has been calculated by combining the collective Council Tax base (2025/26) and rateable value (business rates 2023) for each new unitary council.

The proportionate tax base per resident is broadly similar across both new unitary councils, however Stoke (1.27) demonstrates a proportionally (marginally) greater ability to generate tax per resident than a new Staffordshire unitary council (1.20).

According to the current Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019), Stoke-on-Trent's communities are experiencing greater levels of deprivation and inequality compared to those in Staffordshire. Overall, residents in Staffordshire experience less deprivation and inequality in relation to health, skills, employment, income, crime and living environment. Both new unitary councils would have similar (relatively low) levels of housing deprivation.

These trends are anticipated to continue should Option A be established. Given that the proportionate tax base per new unitary council (per resident) is broadly similar, the Stoke unitary council would be receiving proportionally less funding given the city's higher level of deprivation and inequality.

However, the new Staffordshire unitary council would contain a higher proportion of people aged 65+, indicating that the authority would experience a proportionally greater demand for adult social care.

As of May 2024, the number of Children in Care (CiC) in Staffordshire was 1,293. The number of CiC in Stoke was 1,094 for the same period.

Given that social care (adult social care and children's services) currently accounts for up to c75% of unitary spend, the information contained within this section indicates that the Stoke unitary council would continue to experience a proportionally higher level of need, demand and inequality, despite each new unitary council's tax base per resident being similar.

Proposals should not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area

Although the tax bases of the new unitary authorities would be broadly similar, the implementation of Option A would result in a continuation of current trends, with the Stoke unitary council experiencing higher levels of deprivation and proportionally higher numbers of CiC. However, the new Staffordshire unitary council would experience a proportionally higher level of need/demand associated with adult social care.

Given that Stoke-on-Trent experiences higher levels of deprivation and holds a higher CiC population, this situation is anticipated to continue within the new structures.

- **Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area: Not met**

5. Option A

Financial sustainability

Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks

Level of reserves compared to Council expenditure

The new Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the Stoke unitary council.

The new Staffordshire unitary council would possess reserves (excluding public health & schools) that amount to 106% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

Conversely, Stoke unitary council's reserves equate to 22.9% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

Borrowing as a proportion of reserves

The new Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the Stoke unitary council.

The new Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 71% of general fund reserves.

Stoke unitary council's borrowing is five times (500%) the value of general fund reserves held.

Fees and charges to service expenditure ratio (CIPFA)

The new Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to outperform the Stoke unitary. The new Staffordshire unitary council is forecast possess greater fees and charges generating capabilities, with 19% of the council's total service expenditure being covered by fees and charges.

Stoke unitary council's fees and charges would amount to 14% of total service expenditure.

- **Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks**
 - **Staffordshire: Met**
 - **Stoke: Not met**

For areas covering councils that are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing

Stoke on Trent Council received £21.7m of exceptional financial support in 2024/25, in addition to £20.5m of similar support received in 2023/24.

Option A would result in the responsibility for Stoke City Council's liabilities associated with the Exceptional Financial Support remaining with the city council. Given the council has the lowest level of reserves / Council net expenditure ratio, this would not result in the council being on a firmer footing.

- **Criterion: Proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing**
 - **Staffordshire: Met**
 - **Stoke: Not met**

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

Aggregating services

Should Option A be implemented, given that there will be no aggregation of social care functions, opportunities to reform these functions will rely on internal transformation and collaborative working with system partners, limiting the level of immediate savings available; longer term cost avoidance will require successful public service reform and improved collaboration between system partners.

However, significant scope exists to realise efficiencies through the aggregation of service areas currently delivered by the county council, 8 separate borough and district councils; a plausible case for savings associated with senior officers, front office functions and associated service delivery staff exists.

Given that the operating model for this option is not yet known, it is unclear how a new Staffordshire unitary council would ensure local service delivery and support community capacity / capability / decision making. Given the scale of the new unitary's geographical footprint, localised presence for the majority of service delivery and front office functions is likely. This, along with current shared service arrangements currently in place between councils, would reduce the scale of efficiencies, however significant efficiencies would still likely exist.

Aggregating support service functions

Significant scope for realising efficiencies exists through the aggregation of current back-office arrangements across the county council and 8 district and borough councils. The scale of these savings will be reduced by existing shared back-office arrangements in place (where efficiencies would already have been realised), however significant efficiencies would still likely exist.

Other potential areas for efficiencies

The unitarisation of Staffordshire would result in additional efficiencies associated with the following:

- Property: Reflective of the opportunities to review and refine the new unitary council's estate portfolio, in addition to efficiencies associated with a corporate landlord function operating at a greater scale.
- Councillor allowances and democratic structures: Realised through the removal of district/borough councillor positions.
- Elections: Savings associated with the removal of district council elections (similar to all LGR options for Staffordshire).

Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

- Staffordshire: **Met**
- Stoke: **Not met**

5. Option A

High quality and sustainable public services

Avoidance of service fragmentation

Each current unitary council's social care and other statutory functions would remain intact, with no aggregation or disaggregation of social care services required.

Within Staffordshire, functions currently being delivered by district and borough councils would be combined, with aggregation meaning that fragmentation of services would be avoided. It is assumed that the new Staffordshire unitary council would maintain local structures and service provision, to ensure that existing networks, connections and neighbourhood working would be continued.

The establishment of the new unitary councils would ensure alignment between the boundaries of the councils and other public service organisations, including the Staffordshire Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority, Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care System and Integrated Care Board etc.

Some level of fragmentation will however occur, given the current Alliance between SMDC and High Peak Borough Council, involving the sharing of several district functions between two councils that will be included within separate new unitary councils (Staffordshire and Derbyshire).

- **Criterion: Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services: Met**

Sustainability of existing partnerships and shared service arrangements

Numerous examples of current shared services exist across Staffordshire, in addition to joint service delivery between councils in Staffordshire and Stoke City Council.

The future operating model for the new Staffordshire unitary council has not been outlined, however the aggregation of services across the new unitary would be aided by the following existing arrangements:

- Stafford Borough Council and Cannock Chase District Council share nearly all their services, with the exception of management of elections and housing stock.
- The Staffordshire Waste Partnership, a Staffordshire wide (including Stoke-on-Trent) waste service involving each Waste Collection Authority across the two-tier area.
- East Staffordshire Borough Council and South Staffordshire District Council share IT services.
- Tamworth Borough Council and Lichfield District Council share human resources and payroll services.

5. Option A

High quality and sustainable public services

Examples of services being shared between Staffordshire based councils and Stoke City Council include:

- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council share legal services.

Opportunities for public service reform

Detailed plans identifying specific opportunities for public service reform will be included within final LGR proposals.

Given that there will be no aggregation of social care functions, opportunities to reform these functions will rely on internal transformation and collaborative working with system partners.

Opportunities do however exist, in terms of the opportunity to expand the scope and scale of the new unitary council's social housing operations. Currently only Cannock Chase, Tamworth and Stoke City Council operate Housing Revenue Accounts ('HRA'); the opportunity exists to expand this provision across Staffordshire as part of the new unitary council's approach to addressing the challenges associated with housing supply.

Additional opportunities exist in relation to the interface of services between district/borough councils and the county council, where a Staffordshire wide function could benefit the new area through a place-based approach including the involvement of the NHS, Mental Health Trusts, and Police etc., including:

- The alignment of housing, benefits, support for care leavers and other functions to address recognised gaps in the public service systems.
- A single approach to creating new employment sites.
- A Staffordshire wide approach to establishing transport infrastructure and delivering effective public transport provision, ensuring that the more remote and disconnected areas of the county benefit from investment/connections inside and outside of Staffordshire.
- A sub-regional approach in relation to skills, business support and growth, attracting investment and growing the visitor economy (supported by the Strategic Authority once established).

Criterion: Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money:

Partially met - scope identified

5. Option A

Ability to support devolution arrangements

In March 2025, the Staffordshire Leaders' Board submitted an interim plan to the government outlining proposals for a Mayoral Strategic Authority covering Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, in addition to two possible models for unitary reorganisation.

Ability of option to 'unlock devolution'

Implementing Option A would replace existing two-tier local government arrangements within Staffordshire, thus simplifying governance and the management of devolved powers.

As evidenced within this appraisal, there exists a clear case for a (i) sub-regional and (ii) regional approach to transport, skills and employment, housing and economic development.

Building on current collaboration

Current collaboration by councils across the two-tier area demonstrates the appetite for a regional approach to delivering shared priorities. A devolution deal would support unitary councils with the following areas of current activity/priority:

- Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Joint Economic Strategy: Sets out the shared ambitions and priorities for the regional economy, including driving economic growth, improve skills and supporting local businesses.

- The Joint Strategic Transport Statement (JSTS) between Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council outlines a shared vision for transport across the region, aiming to address common challenges and unlock future opportunities through collaboration.
- Staffordshire Local Visitor Economic Partnership (LVEP) and growth plan: Identifying areas of activity that would benefit from a whole county approach, while harnessing support from the private and voluntary sector, to support recovery and growth of the sector. The growth plan focusses on key areas including business tourism, education and inclusion, marketing and digital transformation and national Influence.
- Staffordshire Housing with Care Strategy: Councils have collaborated on a strategy to ensure an adequate supply of housing with care for people with adult social care needs. The strategy is being implemented through detailed co-produced Local Delivery Plans.
- Fifty500 Midlands Growth Corridor: An investment plan that consists of six propositions aiming to drive decarbonisation of industry and transport and deliver jobs and economic growth along the route of the A50 and A500.

Criterion: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements: Met

5. Option A

Enabling stronger community engagement

Enabling strong community engagement

The ability of a new unitary council to ensure the distinctiveness of its places and communities are understood and retained within a new footprint serving c876,000 residents represents a specific challenge.

While formal plans to ensure effective community engagement and representation have not yet been developed, several existing characteristics provide the conditions and basis for future arrangements:

Town and Parish Councils

Staffordshire benefits from 195 Town and Parish Councils which would continue in place post-local government reform. In collaboration with the new Staffordshire unitary council, they would support ongoing work with communities, voluntary and community groups etc. to maintain and champion the special characteristics of their localities.

No such tier of local government exists in Stoke-on-Trent.

Partnerships with local community, voluntary and charitable organisations

Staffordshire County Council works with voluntary sector infrastructure organisations Support Staffordshire and SCVYS to help support voluntary organisations across the county.

Support Staffordshire supports communities, individuals and organisations to work in collaboration to bring about positive change in their community by actively encouraging social action.

The Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services provides practical support to the voluntary sector, works with more than 200 voluntary and community organisations and supports youth engagement across the county.

Opportunities exist for the new Staffordshire unitary council to continue to work in partnership with these organisations, while also establishing additional structures (in partnership with council communities teams and Town/Parish Councils) to ensure effective community engagement.

Community Safety

Eight local community safety partnerships currently operate across Staffordshire, covering each borough and district council. Membership of these partnerships includes representation from each local police force, local councils, the fire authority, Public Health and probation services. Specific areas of focus include anti-social behaviour, drug and alcohol misuse and re-offending.

- **Criterion: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment: Partially met - scope identified**

5. Option A

Overview of findings

A summary of the appraisal of Option A are provided below:

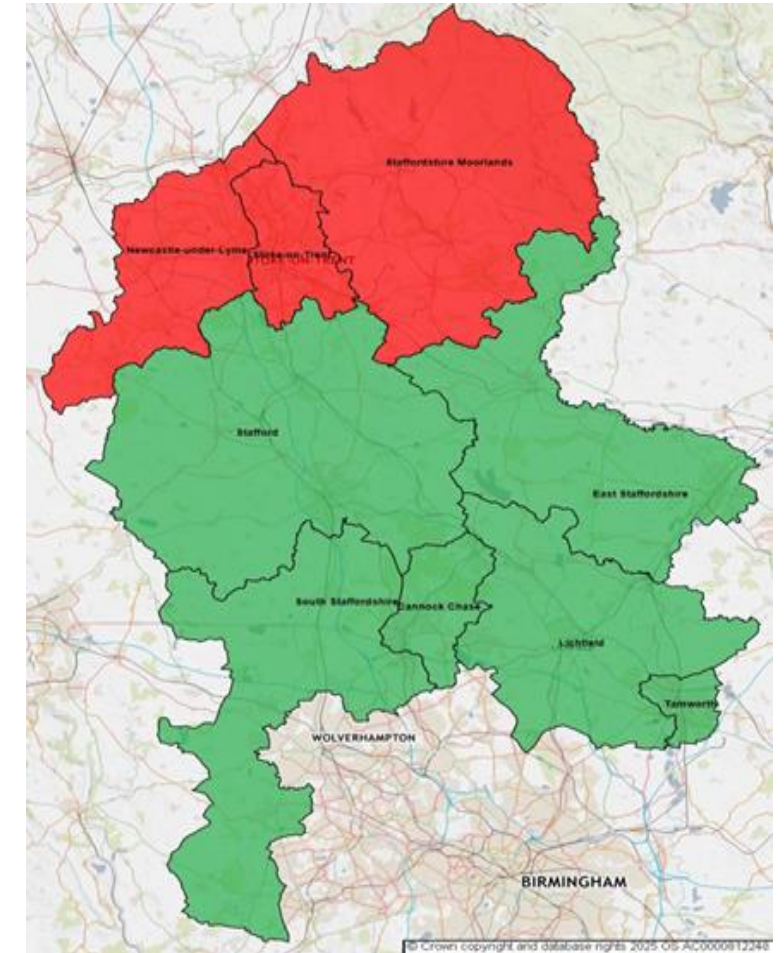
1. The establishment of a single tier of local government		2. The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.		3. Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.		4. Support devolution arrangements.		5. Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.	
Establish a single tier of local government	1 2	Must be the right size to withstand financial shocks	1 2	Improve local government and service delivery, avoiding fragmentation		New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements		Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	
Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000		Putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing	1 2	Opportunities for public service reform, including where they will lead to better value for money					
Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area		The right size to achieve efficiencies	1 2						
Local identity, cultural and historic importance									
Help to increase housing supply									
Proposals should be for sensible economic areas									
Appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage						Key: 1 = New Staffordshire unitary council 2 = New Stoke-on-Trent unitary council			

Section 6

Option B - Place profile and option analysis

6. Option B - Place profile and option analysis

Key	Proposed new unitary council	Area (km2)	Current population (2021)	Combined no. of Councillors
	North Staffordshire Newcastle-under-Lyme Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent	880	477,532	60
	Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Cannock Chase East Staffordshire Lichfield South Staffordshire Stafford Tamworth	1,833	656,977	46



6. Option B - Demographic and economic profile

DEMOGRAPHIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option B		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		North Staff	Southern & Mid Staffs	
Demographics				
Area (km2)	576	880	1,833	2,713
Population	95,851	477,532	656,977	1,134,509
Age 0-15	15.6%	18.3%	17.4%	17.8%
Age 16-64	58.2%	61.5%	60.9%	61.2%
Age 65+	26.2%	20.1%	21.7%	21.0%
Population density (km2)	166	543	358	418
Index of Multiple Deprivation ('IMD')				
Health	6	4	6	IMD is a 10-point ranking system, A decile of 1 is the most deprived, and 10 is the least deprived
Skills	5	4	5	
Employ.	6	5	6	
Income	7	6	6	
Crime	8	6	7	
Housing	6	7	6	
Living env.	6	6	6	

ECONOMIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option B		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		North Staffs	Southern & Mid Staffs	
Economy				
Council Tax Base	34,382	143,040	226,517	369,557
GVA per hour	£29.20	£31.70	£34.92	£33.84
Gross median pay	£732.10	£671.97	£722.87	£705.90
Employmt. rate (16-64)	80.7%	75.6%	78.9%	77.8%
Economic activity (16-64)	82.8%	77.8%	81.3%	80.1%
% pop - Level 3 skills	53.6%	59.2%	63.3%	61.9%
% pop - Level 4 skills	32.8%	41.4%	39.6%	40.2%
% of low paid jobs	28.6%	24.1%	20.8%	21.9%
% of residents who travel less than 10km to work	10.3%	14.7%	11.3%	12.4%
% of residents who travel more than 10km to work	5.9%	4.1%	5.2%	4.8%
Housing target (up to 2035)	454	1,444	4,215	5,659
Employment land*	17.1ha	198.1ha	470.2ha	668.3ha

*Designated or available employment land as set out in each area's Local Plan or Availability Assessment

6. Option B - Current democratic profile

	Population (2021)	Electorate	No. of County Councillors	Electorate per County Councillor	No. of Town and Parish Councils
NORTH	477,532	367,173	60	6,133	53
Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council	123,306	92,911	9	10,323	10
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	95,851	77,056	7	11,008	43
Stoke City Council	258,375	197,984	44	4,500	0
SOUTH AND MID	656,800	497,874	46	10,823	142
Cannock Chase District Council	100,529	76,864	7	10,981	8
East Staffordshire Borough Council	124,019	90,657	9	10,073	38
Lichfield District Council	106,439	82,671	8	10,334	29
South Staffordshire District Council	110,474	85,917	8	10,740	27
Stafford Borough Council	136,870	102,215	9	11,357	40
Tamworth Borough Council	78,646	59,550	5	11,910	0

Population of new unitary councils

Option B would result in new two unitary councils operating across the existing two-tier footprint. This configuration supports the continued alignment with other public sector organisations (ICB/ICS, Police and Crime Commissioner etc.).

The new North Staffordshire unitary would have a population of c477,500, while the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary would have a population of c657,000.

- **Criterion: Proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government: Met**
- **Criterion: Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000:**
 - **North Staffordshire: Not met**
 - **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Met**

Democratic representation

In the absence of a LGBCE review, there appears no alternative other than to leave the current Stoke-on-Trent wards/councillors untouched (this will also be the case with Options C and D). The current ratio in Stoke-on-Trent City Council is 4,500 electors per councillor (an increase from the 3,989 figure referred to in the City's last LGBCE review 2021), which becomes the starting point for consideration of future arrangements.

In this option, outside of Stoke-on-Trent, there will be 16 County Electoral Divisions in the Newcastle-under-Lyme and Staffordshire Moorlands district areas (Electoral Divisions being the most suitable building block for developing new arrangements). Within the Divisions there is a disparity between the largest Division – Biddulph South and Endon at 11,970 electors, and the smallest Division – Bradwell and Porthill at 9,422 electors.

This disparity between wards is also apparent in Stoke-on-Trent, with Dresden and Florence ward having only 3,680 electors for example. To avoid over-representation in the current Stoke-on-Trent area, and relative under representation in the other areas contained within this proposal, and to ensure effective and convenient local government, it is necessary to consider redesignating the current County Electoral Divisions into multi-member wards.

However, for the purposes of providing reasonable electoral equality for voters it is not considered possible to make all the former County Electoral Divisions 3 member Divisions with the consequence that Stoke-on-Trent councillors will be in the majority. This option is not considered appropriate for effective local government arrangements across the new electoral area, creating as it would a dominance in Stoke-on-Trent councillor representation.

Criterion: Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area: Not met

Local identity, culture and heritage

North Staffordshire

The council areas that would constitute the new North Staffordshire unitary council possess a rich and distinctive local identity shaped by the area's industrial heritage, cultural traditions and a strong sense of community pride. Coal mining, ceramics, steelworks and canal transport have shaped the region's economy and landscape. A tight-knit, community focussed ethos defines much of the local character ; resilient, proud, and deeply connected to place. Civic pride is strong, expressed through pride in local traditions, a close connection to the natural environment, community events and heritage preservation.

Additionally, the new North Staffordshire unitary council would benefit from the extensive existing network of Town and Parish Council (across Staffordshire) that would support ongoing engagement with communities, voluntary and community groups etc. to maintain the special characteristics of their localities.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire has a distinct identity shaped by historic towns, royal connections, religious heritage and civic pride, distinct from the industrial character of North Staffordshire.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire balances heritage with innovation; growing sectors include green energy, education, and rural enterprise.

This identity is increasingly shaped by sustainability, quality of life and heritage-led regeneration.

Towns maintain strong local identities, often expressed through independent businesses, historic markets and community-led regeneration.

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would also benefit from the extensive network of Town and Parish Councils operating across the entire area.

- **Criterion: Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance: Met**

Housing supply

North Staffordshire

Housing supply in North Staffordshire is managed at the district and borough level, with each local authority responsible for planning, development and land allocation.

Ongoing pressure exists to balance housing growth with greenbelt protection, particularly in rural and semi-rural parts of North Staffordshire. Infrastructure and transport links (i.e. the A500 corridor) are key to unlocking new housing sites.

The North Staffordshire unitary council would have the capability to identify and unlock cross-boundary (i.e. Staffordshire/Stoke) housing sites and maximise the use of brownfield land. Similarly, unified housing strategy across North Staffordshire could reduce

6. Option B

Sensible geography

planning uncertainty for developers, encouraging investment and speeding up delivery.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

The new unitary council would be required to address issues including the complex mix of rural character and Green Belt constraints to increase housing supply. A single, unified approach would likely prioritise:

- Joint spatial planning to align housing growth with plans for employment growth and infrastructure development.
- Reducing pressure on Green Belt by identifying and agreeing shared strategic sites.
- Towns (i.e. Stafford, Lichfield and Tamworth) benefiting from a shared vision that balances housing growth with heritage and rural character.
- A joint strategy could assist in avoiding the over-concentration of housing in one area, while ensuring each town contributes to regional housing needs.
- Shared planning with transport and Highways could align housing supply with transport corridors (e.g. A38, A34, West Coast Main Line), improving access and reducing congestion.

- Expanding social housing provision across the new unitary, using the existing expertise and capabilities held by Cannock Chase and Tamworth councils; increasing social housing provision and (as part of a wider place-based strategy) increasing the affordability of housing.

Criterion: Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply: Met

6. Option B

Sensible economic area

Sectoral analysis

North Staffordshire

North Staffordshire has a strong legacy in manufacturing, particularly in ceramics and automotive components. The sub-region's economy is diversifying into advanced manufacturing, logistics and digital innovation. Companies in and around Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme anchor the precision engineering sector. Innovations in clean energy technologies, materials science and automation are being supported through partnership between councils and universities.

There is a growing need for skilled workers in healthcare, pharmaceuticals, and elderly care, driven by demographic shifts. Town centre regeneration across each current council area is creating opportunities in urban design, sustainable construction and civil engineering.

The visitor economy would play an important role across the new unitary council's footprint, including ceramics heritage and canal tourism, the Peak District National Park, Alton Towers and outdoor activities. The Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, established in September 2024, could continue to lead the future growth of the region's visitor economy (in partnership with the anticipated Strategic Authority).

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

The economy of Southern and Mid-Staffordshire is diverse, combining

historic market towns, rural enterprise, and modern industry:

- Advanced manufacturing is a prominent sector, driven by automotive and precision engineering.
- Health and care and business services are also sizable sectors, reflecting the area's growing population and administrative roles.
- Brewing and food production remains a key heritage and economic sector. The area also supports food processing and agri-tech, particularly in East Staffordshire and South Staffordshire.
- Retail, tourism and construction each play a role in supporting local economies. Housing growth corridors around Stafford, Tamworth, and Lichfield are driving demand for construction.
- The rural economy, while smaller in scale compared to North Staffordshire, plays a vital role in sustainability and land use.

Comparison

A summary of the characteristics across both new unitary council economies is provided below:

- Broadly similar GVA per hour (NS: £32, S&MS: £35).
- Disparity in gross median pay (NS: £672, S&MS: £723).
- Varying rates of economic activity (NS: 76%, S&MS: 79%) and skills (Level 4, NS: 41%, S&MS: 37%).
- Varying proportion of low paid jobs (NS: 24%, S&MS: 21%).

6. Option B

Sensible economic area

Employment sites

North Staffordshire

The challenges associated with securing more employment sites are documented within the analysis of Option A. Through the development and delivery of a single employment site strategy, the new North Staffordshire unitary would be in a stronger position to support the sub-regional economy by:

- Prioritising sites with potential for advanced manufacturing, logistics, digital, and green industries.
- Investing in enabling infrastructure (roads, utilities, broadband) to unlock stalled or marginal sites.
- Providing SMEs with available space to scale up their businesses.
- Maximising the use of brownfield sites.
- Aligning employment site delivery with large transport infrastructure projects (A500, rail etc.).
- Ensuring new sites support low-carbon development, public transport access, and local employment agreements.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

A lack of available employment sites has been identified as an inhibitor to achieving forecasted job growth; across the area there is a need for modern, flexible employment space to attract and retain businesses.

Moves to increase the supply of employment sites are constrained by current infrastructure (access and utilities), while many potentially suitable sites are located within environmentally sensitive/Green Belt areas.

A new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would be in a stronger position to deliver shared priorities currently contained within individual district and borough council plans, including:

- Unlocking strategic sites near major transport corridors (e.g., M6, A5).
- Investing in infrastructure to make underused or constrained sites viable.
- Focussing on landscape-led development and non-Green Belt sites where possible.
- Integrating employment land into mixed-use developments (include employment land alongside housing) to improve viability and sustainability
- Using Local Development Orders (LDOs) to streamline planning for employment zones.
- Co-ordinating with regional partners (e.g., Black Country, Stoke-on-Trent) to share employment land provision.

6. Option B

Sensible economic area

Investment in transport

North Staffordshire

As detailed within the Joint Strategic Transport Statement (February 2025), intended transport investments focus on enhancing connectivity between Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands. The three areas rely on each other for jobs and local services. Investment priorities for transport include:

- North Staffordshire Bus Rapid Transit: Making buses faster, more reliable, more frequent and run at the right times. Ensuring buses are seen as safe, clean and welcoming, making them a viable alternative to private transport.
- MRN A52 and A53 multimodal Access for All corridors: Improving East to West connectivity between Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands.
- Rail station improvements: Enhancing the capacity and accessibility of Stoke-on-Trent rail station, Kidsgrove rail station, and other local stations, with the potential for new rail stations at Meir and Etruria.
- Mobility Hubs: Improving accessibility to services particularly for areas of deprivation and low car ownership.
- Improved cycling network and people friendly streets: Delivery of a connected cycle network segregated from other traffic, where possible making use of the extensive canal network in partnership with the Canals and Rivers Trust.

- M6 Junction 15 upgrade: Improving efficiency and safety at this important junction which serves as a key link between local and national networks.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Intended transport investments specified within the Joint Strategic Transport Statement focus on enhancing connectivity between Staffordshire and the West Midlands conurbation. South Staffordshire, Lichfield, Cannock, Tamworth and the West Midlands conurbation rely on each other for jobs and services. South Staffordshire has a strong dependence on the conurbation, while there is also a strong connection between Tamworth and Warwickshire. Investment priorities for transport include:

- M54 - M6 Link Road: Provision of a new strategic link road between the M54 and M6 north.
- West Midlands Rail Freight Interchange: Maximising the strategic benefits that will be achieved from transferring strategic road freight journeys onto rail by providing sufficient capacity on the WCML.
- Connectivity to the A5 and A38 Strategic Road Network: Improving the operational efficiency and safety of junctions along the A5 and A38.
- Cross boundary active travel connectivity: Cross boundary walking, wheeling and cycling connections between South Staffordshire and the West Midlands conurbation, making use of disused rail lines and canal network.

6. Option B

Sensible economic area

- Capacity and service improvements on the Birmingham to Derby rail line, beyond HS2 Phase 1: Rail capacity improvements are required beyond HS2 Phase 1 to ensure that improved local rail services are provided for Staffordshire, particularly Tamworth and Burton upon Trent.
- Creation of sustainable settlements: Supporting strong functional economic towns within Southern Staffordshire by improving the efficiency of the highway network, enhancing the sustainable transport network and ensuring active travel is the best choice for short journeys.

Spanning both new unitary authorities: North to east Staffordshire corridor

The North to East Multi-Modal Transport Corridor focuses on enhancing connectivity between Stoke-on-Trent, East Staffordshire and Derbyshire. East Staffordshire and Derbyshire local authority areas particularly rely on each other for jobs and local services.

Projects included within this corridor include:

- Transport improvements to support the growth in sustainable jobs along the A50, including JCB's contribution to growth in the hydrogen industry helping to make Britain a clean energy superpower.

- A50 Structural Maintenance: Delivery of structural maintenance improvements on the A50 to minimise the need for abnormal loads to use the local road network.
- Rail capacity and service improvements: Rail capacity and service improvements to encourage a modal shift away from the A50 and provision of sustainable access to jobs along the A50 corridor.
- MRN A511 and A5121 multimodal Access for All corridors: The multi-modal Access for All corridors through Burton upon Trent.

Spanning both new unitary authorities: North to south Staffordshire corridor

The North to South Multi-Modal Transport Corridor focuses on enhancing connectivity between northern Staffordshire (including Stoke-on-Trent), southern Staffordshire and the West Midlands conurbation along the nationally significant M6 and West Coast Main Line corridor that cuts through Staffordshire. Projects included within this corridor include:

- A34 MRN multi-modal Access for All Corridor: Delivering zero emission buses, an improved walking and cycling environment for communities along the route and technology to improve the flow of traffic.

6. Option B

Sensible economic area

- Wolverhampton to Stafford multi-modal Green Innovation Corridor: Multi-modal transport interventions on the M6, A449 MRN and WCML that support green growth and manufacturing within a proposed Economic Growth Zone between Wolverhampton and Stafford.
- Substantial capacity and service improvements on the West Coast Main Line following HS2 Phase 2A cancellation: Upfront partnership working with Government is required to realise substantial intervention on the WCML to resolve serious capacity constraints following cancellation of HS2 Phase 2A.
- Stafford Rail Station Gateway Project: Enhancing the capacity and accessibility of Stafford rail station to support economic growth proposals and encourage modal shift from road to rail along this strategic north-south corridor.
- A34, A518 and A449 MRN structural maintenance and bridge replacement programme: Major bridge renewal schemes are required on the MRN through Stafford on the A449, which is an M6 Diversion Route, and A518 that connects to the MRN and Stafford rail station.

Summary analysis

The case for Option B representing a sensible economic area

New unitary councils in North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire (Option B) reflect sensible economic geographies for the

following reasons:

- Option B would provide a more focussed and localised approach to strengthening connectivity between sub-regional economies; North Staffordshire's connection with Stoke-on-Trent, Derby and Manchester; Southern and Mid-Staffordshire's connections to Birmingham and the Black Country.
- Increased scope for creating the conditions for growth that are relevant for and required by each new unitary council's respective economy; North Staffordshire's focus on logistics, the visitor economy, clean energy technologies and digital innovation, with Southern and Mid-Staffordshire's economy focussed on precision engineering, retail, brewing and food production and construction.
- While both new unitary authorities will be required to increase the supply of employment sites, a more tailored approach to address sub-regional challenges would be enabled. Across North Staffordshire, a particular focus on supporting SMEs to establish and grow, maximise the use of specific brownfield sites and investment in infrastructure including roads and broadband. Within Southern and Mid-Staffordshire, the focus would be on creating mixed-use developments and unlocking sites near major transport corridors (M6, A5 etc.).

6. Option B

Sensible economic area

- In terms of housing supply, a new North Staffordshire unitary council would be in a position to focus on unlocking new housing sites near key local infrastructure (A500 corridor) and maximise opportunities associated with cross-boundary housing sites (Staffordshire/Stoke/Derby). A Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary would be well placed to align housing and employment growth through a new spatial strategy, balance housing growth with heritage and rural character while avoiding over concentration of supply in specific areas.
- From a transport perspective, the new North Staffordshire unitary council would be well placed to focus on the design and delivery of the 'Northern Cross Boundary' transport packages, given that these projects are designed to enhance connectivity between Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands. Similarly, the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire new unitary council would focus on the 'Southern Cross Boundary' transport packages designed to enhance connectivity between Staffordshire and the West Midlands conurbation.

The case against Option B representing a sensible economic area

The following issues demonstrate the case against the new unitary footprints representing a sensible economic geographical area:

- The current disparity between the between the gross medium pay, levels of economic activity/inactivity and proportion of low paid jobs, placing North Staffordshire at a disadvantage.

- The current shared focus across the region in terms of collectively supporting automotive manufacturing, the visitor economy, rural economy and growing the healthcare workforce.
- Current cross-authority collaboration to unlock housing supply and employment sites and designing/delivering aligned infrastructure projects.
- The potential challenges associated with the design and delivery of the 'North to East multi-model' transport corridor, intended to enhance connectivity between Stoke-on-Trent, East Staffordshire and Derbyshire. Similarly, new organisational boundaries may create challenges associated with the design and delivery of the 'North to South multi-model' transport corridor connectivity between Stoke-on-Trent, East Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

These challenges would not be insurmountable and reflect the current situation in terms of projects being delivered across existing council boundaries. However, the new unitaries will be required to ensure close joint working and co-ordination, in addition to the crucial role that would be played by the (anticipated) Strategic Authority in supporting joint working and securing investment.

Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas: Met

6. Option B

Sensible economic area

Appropriate tax base

The tax base has been calculated by combining the collective Council Tax base (2025/26) and rateable value (business rates 2023) for each new unitary council.

The proportionate tax base per resident is higher in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire (1.33) compared to North Staffordshire (1.14). According to the current Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019), the combined population of North Staffordshire would exhibit a marginally greater level of health, skills, employment and crime deprivation. Deprivation in relation to the living environment would be at the same levels across both councils, while deprivation relating to housing is slightly greater across Southern Staffordshire. It should be noted that for the majority of measures, variance in the levels of deprivation is only marginal (i.e. 1 point) and broadly in line with the national average.

Given that the proportionate tax base per new unitary council (per resident) is lower in North Staffordshire, the North Staffordshire unitary council would receive proportionally less funding to address a marginally higher level of deprivation.

Both new unitary authorities would share a similar proportion of people aged 65+, indicating that each authority would experience similar levels of demand for adult social care (on a pro-rata basis, given their different populations levels).

The required level of data is not available to forecast the Children in Care (CiC) population for each new unitary council. However, given that Stoke's care population was 1,094 CiC in May 2024 (a proportionally higher number of CiC than the Staffordshire average per resident), it can be assumed that North Staffordshire's care population would be larger than that in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire.

Proposals should not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area

Based on available information, it is assumed that a degree of disadvantage would exist through the differing tax bases and anticipated higher levels of health deprivation (both favouring Southern and Mid-Staffordshire over North Staffordshire).

Further work is however required to understand the anticipated demand for CiC and adult social care services associated with each new unitary council. Given the current spend on social care services by existing unitary councils (c75% in many cases), the size and associated cost of each new unitary council's social care responsibilities would be a significant determining factor in creating any advantage / disadvantage between the two new unitary councils.

- **Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area: Partially met**

Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks

Level of reserves compared to Council expenditure

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would possess reserves (excluding public health & schools) that amount to 140% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

The North Staffordshire unitary council's reserves would equate to 47% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

Borrowing as a proportion of reserves

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

The Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 72% of general fund reserves.

The North Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 272% of general fund reserves.

Fees and charges to service expenditure ratio (CIPFA)

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast possess greater fees and charges generating capabilities, with 19% of the council's total service expenditure being covered by fees and charges.

North Staffordshire unitary council's fees and charges would amount to 16.8% of total service expenditure.

- **Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks**

- **North Staffordshire: Partially met**
- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Met**

For areas covering councils that are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing

Stoke on Trent Council received £21.7m of Exceptional Financial Support in 2024/25, in addition to £20.5m of similar support received in 2023/24.

The support is aimed at addressing significant financial challenges, particularly in social care and Children's Services. The Council is required to repay the support over a period of up to 20 years, with the repayment scheduled structured to ensure that the Council can manage financial pressures while gradually reducing its debt.

There is no Government proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation.

6. Option B

Financial sustainability

Implementing Option B would result in the liabilities associated with the repayment of Exceptional Financial Support transferring to the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

As outlined within the following pages, the requirement for disaggregation of Staffordshire County Council's social care and the aggregation of the North Staffordshire element with Stoke City Council's social care functions would be complex and incur cost. Efficiencies would be realised across North Staffordshire however, given (for example) the reduction in the number of Director of Children's Services and Director of Adult Social Services required, in addition to establishing a single leadership team.

Given that aggregation of social care functions will take place across Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council's social care provision, opportunities to reform these functions would exist. The new North Staffordshire unitary council could commit to a 'transformational' LGR process which would identify opportunities for innovation across Children's Services rather than aim for a 'safe and legal' service. This could involve Stoke City Council's current transformation programme extending into the new unitary council.

A reconfiguration of services to focus on a neighbourhood model that prioritises (for example) prevention through person centred services and system wide collaboration has the potential to realise both meaningful impact and cost avoidance across the system.

These efficiencies would be in addition to Stoke City Council's current plans to ensure internal efficiencies to enable the repayment of Exceptional Financial Support.

Given that proposals for a new North Staffordshire unitary council's social care operating model and plans for system wide transformation are currently not known, it is currently unclear whether the new council would be in a position to sustain the liabilities associated with Stoke's Exceptional Financial Support.

Additionally, the costs associated with establishing the new unitary council would be the responsibility of the council, meaning that cost pressures (in addition to repaying the Exceptional Financial Support) would be created.

- **Criterion: Proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing**
 - **North Staffordshire: Partially met**
 - **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Met**

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

To assess the opportunities for efficiencies, an overview of the likely aggregation and disaggregation for each new unitary council is required:

North Staffordshire

- Aggregation of all services currently delivered by Stoke City Council with elements of Staffordshire County Council's functions that are specific to the geography of North Staffordshire.
- The aggregation of SMDC and Newcastle-under-Lyme's district functions with those of Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council (relevant to North Staffordshire).
- The disaggregation of SMDC and High Peak Borough Council's alliance arrangements.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

- Combining all services currently delivered by the in-scope district and borough councils, in addition to Staffordshire County Council's functions that are specific to the geography of Southern and Mid-Staffordshire.

Staffordshire County Council

- To enable the above, the services, functions and operating model of Staffordshire County Council will be disaggregated in line with the geographical boundaries of the new unitary councils.

Exploring the potential for efficiencies

Adult social care, Children's Services and other statutory functions

- The implementation of Option B would result in a restructuring of social care services;
 - Firstly, Staffordshire County Council's social care functions would be disaggregated to reflect the north/south split across the county.
 - Secondly, the social care functions and operating model for North Staffordshire and Stoke City Council would be aggregated.
 - Thirdly, the county council's social care function and operating model specific to Southern and Mid-Staffordshire would be transferred to the new unitary council.

Ultimately two separate social care services would be in place (as is the case now, although functioning across different geographies). The degree of complexity associated with aggregating Stoke and North Staffordshire's social care functions and operating models is likely to incur cost and take time, reducing the scope for financial efficiencies and creating risks in terms of service continuity.

A similar situation will occur in relation to all other statutory services and functions currently delivered by both Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council; a reconfiguration of functions and services (i.e. education, transport, housing, planning and development, environmental services, libraries, leisure and culture, Public Health, emergency planning and community safety, council tax and benefits etc.) across the new geography of the new unitary councils.

6. Option B

Financial sustainability

Given that the operating model for this option is not yet known, it is unclear how a new Staffordshire unitary council would ensure local service delivery and support community capacity / capability / decision making.

Both footprints for the new unitary councils will likely mean that decisions are made closer to communities when compared with Option A. However, the cost of a localised presence will in turn reduce the scope and scale for potential efficiencies (compared to Option A).

Regional partnerships

Clarity is required on the future of the Staffordshire Waste Partnership should Option B be implemented; it is assumed that the partnership would remain in place; any disaggregation/fragmentation of the current model would likely lead to additional one-off and ongoing costs being incurred.

District and borough functions

North Staffordshire: Potential for efficiencies exist given that the services and functions of two district councils would transfer to the new unitary council (Staffordshire Moorlands and Newcastle-under-Lyme).

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Significant scope for realising efficiencies exists through the aggregation of current services and functions across the county council (elements related to Southern and Mid-Staffordshire) and 6 district and borough councils; a plausible case for savings associated with senior officers, front office functions and associated service delivery staff exists.

Support services

North Staffordshire: Scope for efficiencies exists, given that two unitary councils currently operate separate support service functions. The disaggregation of Staffordshire's existing support services operating model into two separate functions will result in complexity and cost.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Significant scope for realising efficiencies exists through the aggregation of current support service arrangements across the county council (elements related to Southern and Mid-Staffordshire) and 6 district and borough councils. The scale of these savings will be reduced by existing shared back-office arrangements in place and the complexities of disaggregating the county council's existing support service operating model. However, significant efficiencies would still likely exist.

Other potential areas of efficiencies

Efficiencies may also be realised in the following areas although the scope and scale for financial savings will be less than for Option A:

- **Property:** Reflective of the opportunities to review and refine each new unitary council's estate portfolio, in addition to efficiencies associated with a corporate landlord function operating at a greater scale.
- **Councillor allowances and democratic structures:** Realised through the removal of district/borough councillor positions.
- **Elections:** Savings associated with the removal of district council elections (similar to all LGR options for Staffordshire).

6. Option B

High quality and sustainable public services

- Elections: Savings associated with the removal of district council elections (similar to all LGR options for Staffordshire).

Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

- North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Partially met**

Avoidance of service fragmentation

As already outlined, unitary council statutory functions and their associated services and operating model will be aggregated (Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council into North Staffordshire) and disaggregated (Staffordshire to Southern and Mid-Staffordshire).

Specific to social care (adults and children), this represents a significant fragmentation of services. Additionally, transferring social care to the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would result in a group of councils with limited experience of delivering social care services being responsible for high-risk services that constitute c75% of the new council's budget. The transfer of experienced leadership and corporate intelligence from the county council to the new unitary council will be of critical importance; new Directors of Children's Services and Adult Social Care, in addition to leadership teams, will need to be appointed by the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council.

Within Southern and Mid-Staffordshire, functions currently being delivered by district and borough councils would be aggregated,

meaning that fragmentation of services would be avoided.

Criterion: Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services:

- North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Partially met**

Opportunities for public service reform

Detailed plans identifying specific opportunities for public service reform will be included within final LGR proposals.

Given that aggregation of social care functions will take place across Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council's social care provision, opportunities to reform these functions would exist.

The new North Staffordshire unitary council could commit to a 'transformational' LGR process, as opposed to the conventional 'transactional' approach, which would identify opportunities for innovation across Children's Services rather than aim for a 'safe and legal' service. A reconfiguration of services to focus on a neighbourhood model that prioritises (for example) prevention through person centred services and system wide collaboration has the potential to realise both meaningful impact and cost avoidance across the system.

A similar approach could also be adopted in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire, however challenges will exist given that the councils that

6. Option B

High quality and sustainable public services

would constitute the new unitary council have limited direct experience of delivering social care. The immediate emphasis would be on the safe disaggregation of social care from Staffordshire County Council, although opportunities would exist in terms of transforming social care services and their associated systems.

Other opportunities for public service reform would also be available. As outlined in Option A, the opportunity exists to expand the scope and scale of the both new unitary council's social housing functions. Currently only Cannock Chase, Tamworth and Stoke City Council operate Housing Revenue Accounts ('HRA'); expanding this provision across both new unitary councils to address the challenges associated with housing supply represents an opportunity.

Additional opportunities exist for both new unitary councils in relation to the interface between district/borough councils and current county/city council services. Through a place-based approach including the involvement of the NHS, Mental Health Trusts, and Police etc., a number of public services could be reformed:

- The alignment of housing, benefits, support for care leavers and other functions to address recognised gaps in public service systems.
- A more localised approach (compared to current arrangements and those outlined in Option A) to designing and delivering public transport provision. For example, a new unitary that focusses solely

on North Staffordshire would be better placed to ensure that the more remote and disconnected areas of the unitary benefit from investment/connections.

- A sub-regional approach in relation to skills, business support and growth, attracting investment and growing the visitor economy (supported by the Strategic Authority once established).

Criterion: Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money:

- **North Staffordshire: Partially met - scope identified**
- **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Partially met - scope identified**

6. Option B

Ability to support devolution arrangements

Ability of option to ‘unlock devolution’

Implementing Option B would replace existing two-tier local government arrangements with two new unitary councils. Governance and accountabilities would therefore be simplified, with two new unitary councils working jointly (as equal constituent members) with the (anticipated) Strategic Authority to deliver regional priorities.

Building on current collaboration

As evidenced within this appraisal, there exists a clear case for a (i) sub-regional and (ii) regional approach to transport, skills and employment, housing and economic development.

Current collaboration by councils across the two-tier area demonstrates the appetite for a regional approach to delivering shared priorities. A devolution deal would support unitary councils with the following areas of current activity/priority:

- **Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Joint Economic Strategy:** Sets out the shared ambitions and priorities for the regional economy, including driving economic growth, increasing skills and supporting local businesses.
- **The Joint Strategic Transport Statement (JSTS)** between Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council outlines a shared vision for transport across the region, aiming to address common challenges and unlock future opportunities through collaboration.

- **Staffordshire Local Visitor Economic Partnership (LVEP)** and growth plan: Identifying areas of activity that would benefit from a whole county approach, while harnessing support from the private and voluntary sector, to support recovery and growth of the sector. The growth plan focusses on key areas including business tourism, education and inclusion, marketing and digital transformation and national influence.
- **Staffordshire Housing with Care Strategy:** Councils have collaborated on a strategy to ensure an adequate supply of housing with care for people with adult social care needs. The strategy is being implemented through detailed co-produced Local Delivery Plans.
- **Fifty500 Midlands Growth Corridor:** An investment plan that consists of six propositions aiming to drive decarbonisation of industry and transport and deliver jobs and economic growth along the route of the A50 and A500.

Criterion: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements: Met

6. Option B

Enabling stronger community engagement

Enabling strong community engagement

The ability of the new unitary councils to ensure the distinctiveness of their places and communities are understood and retained within a new footprints serving c477,500 and c657,000 residents respectively represents a specific challenge.

While formal plans to ensure effective community engagement and representation have not yet been developed, several existing characteristics provide the conditions and basis for future arrangements:

Town and Parish Councils

Staffordshire benefits from 195 Town and Parish Councils which would continue in place post-local government reform. In collaboration with the new North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary councils, they would support ongoing work with communities, voluntary and community groups etc. to maintain the special characteristics of their localities.

No such tier of local government exists in Stoke-on-Trent.

Partnerships with local community, voluntary and charitable organisations

Staffordshire County Council works with voluntary sector infrastructure organisations Support Staffordshire and SCVYS to help support voluntary organisations across the county.

Additionally, the Staffordshire Council of Voluntary Youth Services provides practical support to the voluntary sector, works with more than 200 voluntary and community organisations and supports youth engagement across the county.

Each district council currently supports a range of local community organisations and networks; the assumption is that each new unitary council will retain these or establish similar local functions to ensure community and voluntary sector organisations continue to receive support.

Additionally, eight local community safety partnerships currently operate across Staffordshire, covering each borough and district council. The assumption is that these would be retained.

Opportunities exist for the new unitary authorities (most likely in partnership with existing Town and Parish Councils) to establish various community structures to assist in local decision making, including area-based forums, neighbourhood assemblies, community asset transfer and an extension of existing neighbourhood planning arrangements. Alternatively, reform of public service systems towards a neighbourhood based model of delivery could assist in the delivery of innovative people-centred services.

- **Criterion: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment: Met**

6. Option B

Overview of findings

A summary of the appraisal of Option B are provided below:

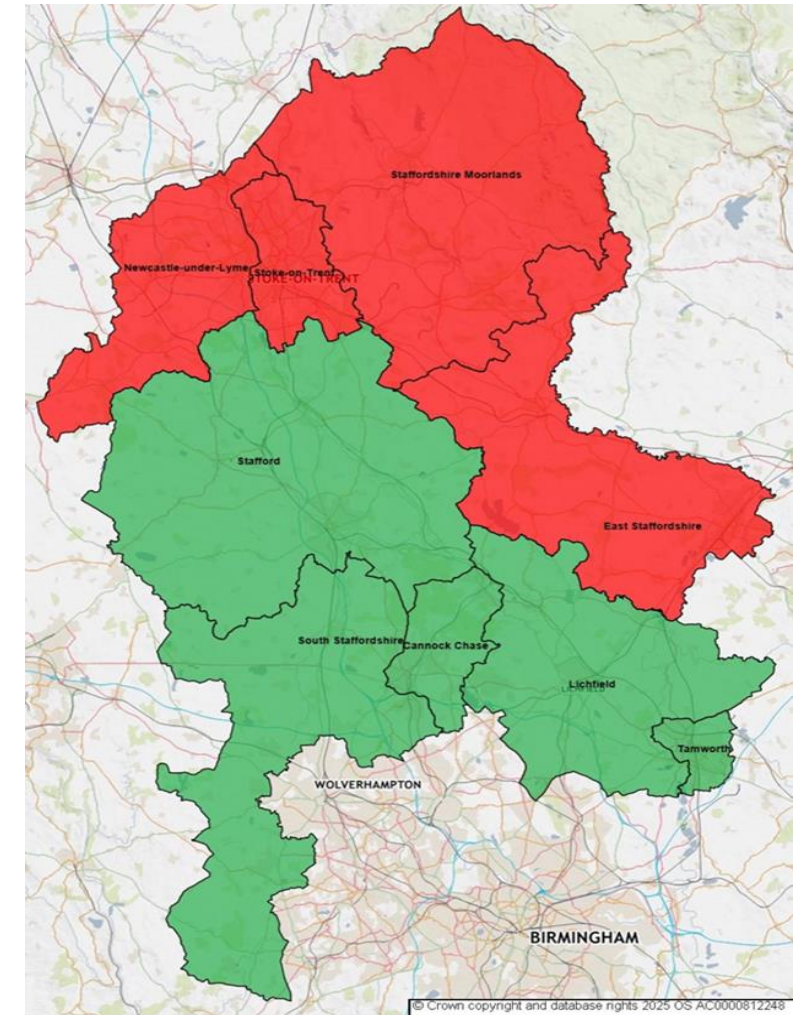
1. The establishment of a single tier of local government		2. The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.		3. Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.		4. Support devolution arrangements.		5. Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.	
Establish a single tier of local government		Must be the right size to withstand financial shocks	 	Improve local government and service delivery, avoiding fragmentation	 	New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements		Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	
Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000	 	Putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing	 	Opportunities for public service reform, including where they will lead to better value for money	 				
Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area		The right size to achieve efficiencies	 						
Local identity, cultural and historic importance									
Help to increase housing supply									
Proposals should be for sensible economic areas									
Appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage						Key: 1 = New North Staffordshire unitary council 2 = New Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council			

Section 7

Option C - Place profile and option analysis

7. Option C - Place profile and option analysis

Key	Proposed new unitary council	Area (km2)	Current population (2021)	Combined no. of Councillors
	North Staffordshire East Staffordshire Newcastle-under-Lyme Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent	1,267	601,551	69
	Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Cannock Chase Lichfield South Staffordshire Stafford Tamworth	1,446	532,958	37



7. Option C - Demographic and economic profile

DEMOGRAPHIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option C		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		North Staff	Southern & Mid Staffs	
Demographics				
Area (km2)	576	1,267	1,446	2,713
Population	95,851	601,551	532,958	1,134,509
Age 0-15	15.6%	18.5%	17.1%	17.8%
Age 16-64	58.2%	61.7%	60.5%	61.2%
Age 65+	26.2%	19.8%	22.4%	21.0%
Population density (km2)	166	475	369	418
Index of Multiple Deprivation ('IMD')				
Health	6	5	6	IMD is a 10-point ranking system, A decile of 1 is the most deprived, and 10 is the least deprived
Skills	5	4	5	
Employ.	6	5	6	
Income	7	6	6	
Crime	8	6	7	
Housing	6	7	6	
Living env.	6	5	7	

ECONOMIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option C		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		North Staff	Southern & Mid Staffs	
Economy				
Council Tax Base	34,382	184,615	184,942	369,557
GVA per hour	£29.20	£33.18	£34.38	£33.84
Gross median pay	£732.10	£671.55	£733.38	£705.90
Employmt. rate (16-64)	80.7%	76.8%	78.7%	77.8%
Economic activity (16-64)	82.8%	78.7%	81.2%	80.1%
% pop - Level 3 skills	53.6%	59.9%	63.5%	61.9%
% pop - Level 4 skills	32.8%	41.6%	39.1%	40.2%
% of low paid jobs	28.6%	23.2%	20.8%	21.9%
% of residents who travel less than 10km to work	10.3%	14.4%	10.8%	12.4%
% of residents who travel more than 10km to work	5.9%	4.3%	5.3%	4.8%
Housing target (up to 2035)	454	2,046	3,613	5,659
Employment land*	17.1ha	303.6ha	364.7ha	668.3ha

*Designated or available employment land as set out in each area's Local Plan or Availability Assessment

7. Option C - Current democratic profile

	Population (2021)	Electorate	No. of County Councillors	Electorate per County Councillor	No. of town and parish councils
NORTH	601,500	458,608	69	6,646	91
East Staffordshire Borough Council	124,019	90,657	9	10,073	38
Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council	123,306	92,911	9	10,323	10
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	95,851	77,056	7	11,008	43
Stoke City Council	258,375	197,984	44	4,500	0
SOUTH AND MID	532,950	407,217	37	11,006	104
Cannock Chase District Council	100,529	76,864	7	10,981	8
Lichfield District Council	106,439	82,671	8	10,334	29
South Staffordshire District Council	110,474	85,917	8	10,740	27
Stafford Borough Council	136,870	102,215	9	11,357	40
Tamworth Borough Council	78,646	59,550	5	11,910	0

Population of new unitary councils

Option C would result in new two unitary councils operating across the existing two-tier footprint. This configuration supports the continued alignment with other public sector organisations (ICB/ICS, Police and Crime Commissioner etc.).

The new North Staffordshire unitary would have a population of c602,000, while the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary would have a population of c532,000.

- **Criterion: Proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government: Met**
- **Criterion: Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000:**
 - **North Staffordshire: Met**
 - **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Met**

Democratic representation

This option will add to Option B a further 9 Electoral Divisions from East Staffordshire Borough Council district area. Again, keeping the Stoke-on-Trent City Council electoral arrangements as they are, there would now be a total of 25 County Electoral Divisions and, on the face of it, this provides the opportunity to address the under representation resulting from Option

B, i.e. by creating 25 multi-member Divisions. In this scenario, there would be a total of 94 councillors in the new North Staffordshire unitary council; 44 from the current Stoke-on-Trent City Council area and 50 from the current Staffordshire County Council county area. However, as previously confirmed, there is some disparity between the number of electors in the Electoral Divisions which could result in difficulty in ensuring electoral equality for voters. This option would, however, remove the electoral dominance of the Stoke-on-Trent area.

- **Criterion: Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area: Partially met**

Local identity, culture and heritage

North Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance: Met

Housing supply

North Staffordshire (in addition to analysis provided for Option B)

East Staffordshire Borough Council plays a significant but proportionate role in contributing to Staffordshire's overall housing supply. East Staffordshire has historically delivered a steady share of new homes, typically contributing around 12–15% of Staffordshire's total annual housing completions. The borough includes key growth areas such as Burton upon Trent, which has seen consistent housing development due to strong transport links and economic activity.

East Staffordshire borders both the West Midlands conurbation and Derbyshire, absorbing housing demand spillover from both areas.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply: Met

7. Option C

Sensible economic area

Sectoral analysis

North Staffordshire (in addition to analysis provided for Option B)

East Staffordshire Borough plays a strategic and growing role in the overall Staffordshire economy. The borough hosts c7,600 businesses, the majority of which are SMEs. Professional services, retail and hospitality, construction, food and food production are all important sectors to the local economy.

The table opposite demonstrates the net economic impact of including East Staffordshire Borough Council within Option B. A summary of key areas of impact is provided below:

- The Council Tax Base increases by 29% for Option C (184,615), compared to Option B (143,040).
- Measures including GVA, gross median pay, economic activity, skills levels and low paid jobs remain broadly similar.
- The inclusion of East Staffordshire increases the current housing target (+29%) and level of designated employment land (35%) significantly.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

New North Staffordshire unitary council	Option B (i.e. without ESBC)	Option C (i.e. with ESBC)	Impact of including ESBC
Economy			
Council Tax Base	143,040	184,615	41,575
GVA per hour	£31.70	£33.18	£1.48
Gross median pay	£671.97	£671.55	-£0.42
Employmt. rate (16-64)	75.6%	76.8%	1.20%
Economic activity (16-64)	77.8%	78.7%	0.90%
% pop - Level 3 skills	59.2%	59.9%	0.70%
% pop - Level 4 skills	41.4%	41.6%	0.20%
% of low paid jobs	24.1%	23.2%	-0.9%
% of residents who travel less than 10km to work	14.7%	14.4%	-0.3%
% of residents who travel more than 10km to work	4.1%	4.3%	0.2%
Housing target (up to 2035)	1,444	2,046	602.00
Employment land*	198.1ha	303.6ha	105.50ha

7. Option C

Sensible economic area

Investment in transport

Please see Option B for the full analysis on transport.

Overall analysis

A specific benefit of including East Staffordshire within the new North Staffordshire unitary council relates to the resultant alignment with plans for the North to East Multi-Modal Transport Corridor which focuses on enhancing connectivity between Stoke-on-Trent, East Staffordshire and Derbyshire.

However, the majority of East Staffordshire is clearly part of the Southern Staffordshire economy, meaning that while the creation of Option C would benefit the new North Staffordshire unitary authority, it would disadvantage both the local and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire economy

Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas: Partially met

Appropriate tax base

The tax base has been calculated by combining the collective Council Tax base (2025/26) and rateable value (business rates 2023) for each new unitary council.

The proportionate tax base per resident is broadly similar across both new unitary councils; North Staffordshire would achieve 1.23 per resident, while the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire would achieve 1.28 per resident.

As per Option B, the combined population of North Staffordshire would exhibit a marginally greater level of health, skills, employment, crime and living environment deprivation. Deprivation relating to housing is slightly greater across Southern and Mid Staffordshire. It should be noted that for the majority of measures, variance in the levels of deprivation is only marginal (i.e. 1 point). Additionally, deprivation levels (with the exception of skills (North Staffordshire)) are at or below national averages.

Proposals should not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area

Based on available information, it is not assumed that the creation of the new North Staffordshire and Southern and Mid Staffordshire unitary councils would create a significant undue advantage/disadvantage for one council/area. Levels of deprivation across both new unitary councils would be broadly similar, while the respective tax bases would also be at similar levels.

Further work is however required to understand the anticipated demand for CiC and adult social care services associated with each new unitary council. The size and associated cost of each new unitary council's social care responsibilities would be a significant determining factor in creating any advantage / disadvantage between the two new unitary councils.

- **Criterion: Proposals create an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area: Met**

Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks

Level of reserves compared to Council expenditure

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would possess reserves (excluding public health & schools) that amount to 146% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

The North Staffordshire unitary council's reserves would equate to 63% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

Borrowing as a proportion of reserves

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

The Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 77% of general fund reserves.

The North Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 212% of general fund reserves.

Fees and charges to service expenditure ratio (CIPFA)

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast possess greater fees and charges generating capabilities, with 18.8% of the council's total service expenditure being covered by fees and charges.

North Staffordshire unitary council's fees and charges would amount to 17.1% of total service expenditure.

- **Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks**
 - North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
 - Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Met**

For areas covering councils that are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

- **Criterion: Proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing**
 - North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
 - Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Met**

7. Option C

Financial sustainability & high quality and sustainable public services

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B. The inclusion of East Staffordshire within Option C differs only from Option B with the inclusion of the need to aggregate East Staffordshire's district functions with those of SMDC and Newcastle-under-Lyme, to then merge with those of Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council (relevant to North Staffordshire). The addition of East Staffordshire does not impact the conclusions made.

- **Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies**
 - **North Staffordshire: Partially met**
 - **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Partially met**

Avoidance of service fragmentation

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B. The inclusion of East Staffordshire within Option C does not impact the conclusions made, as East Staffordshire does not currently share services across its boundary beyond wider cross-Staffordshire partnerships. As such, no fragmentation of services would occur, and therefore, the conclusions for Option C mirror those for Option B.

- **Criterion: Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services:**
 - **North Staffordshire: Partially met**
 - **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Partially met**

Opportunities for public service reform

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B. The inclusion of East Staffordshire within Option C does not impact the conclusions made, as East Staffordshire does not currently provide social care functions. Therefore, in Option C, the aggregation of social care functions taking place across Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council's social care provision would provide the same opportunities for public service reform.

- **Criterion: Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money:**
 - **North Staffordshire: Partially met - scope identified**
 - **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Partially met - scope identified**

7. Option C

Ability to support devolution arrangements & enabling stronger community engagement

Ability of option to ‘unlock devolution’

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B. The inclusion of East Staffordshire within Option C does not impact the conclusions made, as the inclusion of East Staffordshire within Option C again replaces existing two-tier local government arrangements with two new unitary councils, simplifying governance and accountability.

Criterion: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements: Met

Enabling strong community engagement

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B. The inclusion of East Staffordshire within Option C does not impact the conclusions made. East Staffordshire currently supports a range of local community organisations and networks and will bring this knowledge to the new unitary arrangement. The assumption is that each new unitary council will retain these or establish similar local functions to ensure community and voluntary sector organisations continue to receive support.

Criterion: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment: Met

7. Option C

Overview of findings

A summary of the appraisal of Option C are provided below:

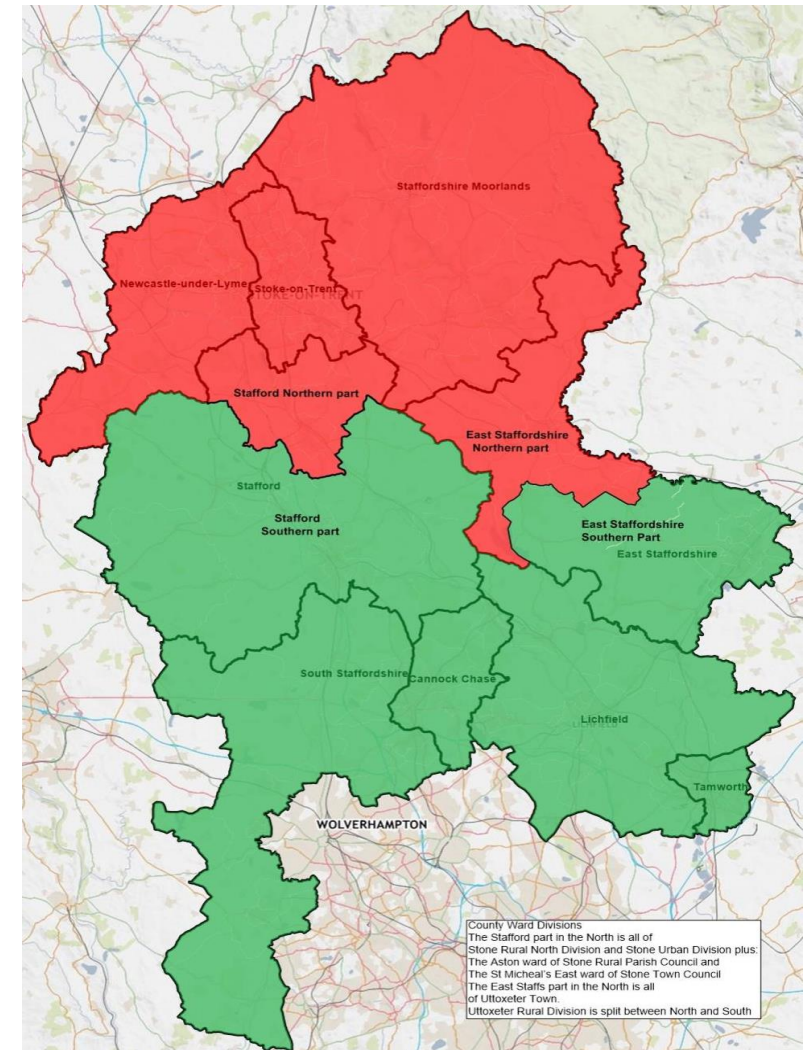
1. The establishment of a single tier of local government		2. The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.		3. Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.		4. Support devolution arrangements.		5. Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.	
Establish a single tier of local government		Must be the right size to withstand financial shocks	 	Improve local government and service delivery, avoiding fragmentation	 	New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements		Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	
Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000	 	Putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing	 	Opportunities for public service reform, including where they will lead to better value for money	 				
Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area		The right size to achieve efficiencies	 						
Local identity, cultural and historic importance									
Help to increase housing supply									
Proposals should be for sensible economic areas									
Appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage						Key: 1 = New North Staffordshire unitary council 2 = New Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council			

Section 8

Option D - Place profile and option analysis

8. Option D - Place profile and option analysis

Key	Proposed new unitary council	Area (km2)	Current population (2021)	Combined no. of Councillors (2025)
	North Staffordshire East Staffordshire (Part) Newcastle-under-Lyme Stafford (Part) Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent	880	536,204	66
	Southern and Mid-Staffordshire East Staffordshire (Part) Cannock Chase Lichfield South Staffordshire Stafford (Part) Tamworth	1,833	598,305	40



8. Option D - Demographic and economic profile

DEMOGRAPHIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option D		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		North Staffs	Mid Staffs	
Demographics*				
Area (km2)	576	1,146	1,567	2,713
Population	95,851	536,204	598,305	1,134,509
Age 0-15	15.6%	18.2%	17.5%	17.8%
Age 16-64	58.2%	61.4%	61.0%	61.2%
Age 65+	26.2%	20.4%	21.5%	21.0%
Population density (km2)	166	452	393	418
Index of Multiple Deprivation ('IMD')				
Health	6	4	6	IMD is a 10-point ranking system, A decile of 1 is the most deprived, and 10 is the least deprived
Skills	5	4	5	
Employ.	6	5	6	
Income	7	6	6	
Crime	8	6	7	
Housing	6	7	6	
Living env.	6	6	6	

ECONOMIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option D		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		North Staffs	Southern & Mid Staffs	
Economy**				
Council Tax Base	34,382	188,645	180,912	369,557
GVA per hour	£29.20	£31.70	£34.92	£33.84
Gross median pay	£732.10	£671.97	£722.87	£705.90
Employmt. rate (16-64)	80.70%	75.6%	78.9%	77.8%
Economic activity (16-64)	82.80%	77.8%	81.3%	80.1%
% pop - Level 3 skills	53.60%	59.2%	63.3%	61.9%
% pop - Level 4 skills	32.80%	41.4%	39.6%	40.2%
% of low paid jobs	28.60%	24.1%	20.8%	21.9%
% of residents who travel less than 10km to work	10.3%	18.2%	16.2%	12.4%
% of residents who travel more than 10km to work	5.9%	14.6%	10.8%	4.84%
Housing target (up to 2035)	454	1,444	4,215	5,659
Employment land***	17.1ha	198.1ha	470.2ha	668.3ha

**Economic data includes East Staffordshire and Stafford in the Mid Staffs Option D as more granular ward data is not available

***Designated or available employment land as set out in each area's Local Plan or Availability Assessment

8. Option D - Current democratic profile

	Population (2021)	Electorate	No. of County Councillors	Electorate per County Councillor	No. of Town and Parish Councils
NORTH	536,204	416,766	66	6,315	57
Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council	123,306	92,911	9	10,323	10
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	95,851	77,056	7	11,008	43
Stoke City Council	258,375	197,984	44	4,500	0
East Staffordshire Borough Council (part)	25,730	21,404	2	10,702	2
Stafford Borough Council (part)	32,942	27,411	4	6,853	2
SOUTH AND MID-STAFFORDSHIRE	598,305	449,059	40	11,226	138
Cannock Chase District Council	100,529	76,864	7	10,981	8
Lichfield District Council	106,439	82,671	8	10,334	29
South Staffordshire District Council	110,474	85,917	8	10,740	27
Tamworth Borough Council	78,646	59,550	5	11,910	0
East Staffordshire Borough Council (part)	98,289	69,253	7	9,893	36
Stafford Borough Council (part)	103,928	74,804	5	14,961	38

Population of new unitary councils

Option D would result in new two unitary councils operating across the existing two-tier footprint. This configuration supports the continued alignment with other public sector organisations (ICB/ICS, Police and Crime Commissioner etc.).

The new North Staffordshire unitary would have a population of c536,000, while the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary would have a population of c598,000.

- **Criterion: Proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government: Met**
- **Criterion: Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000:**
 - **North Staffordshire: Met**
 - **Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: Met**

Democratic representation

In this Option, 4 further Electoral Divisions (with some parish wards/councils) are added to the Option 2 proposal (using Electoral Divisions as the building blocks), namely:

From the Stafford BC area:

- Stone Rural North ED

- Stone Urban ED (currently in Stafford Trent Valley ED)
- Aston Parish Ward of Stone Rural Parish Council (currently in Stafford Trent Valley ED)
- St Michael's East Ward of the Stone Town Council

From the East Staffordshire BC area:

- Uttoxeter Rural ED
- Uttoxeter Town ED

The Divisions/Wards added ensure that, in particular, the current Parish Council arrangements are preserved within the Stafford Borough area and avoid the splitting of any parish wards from their Council which would not be permissible in the absence of a LGBCE review. It also retains the connectivity between the two Stone Electoral Divisions and the two Uttoxeter Divisions.

This option offers the opportunity to ensure effective and convenient local government arrangements, and to better reflect the equality of electors per councillor, by the creation of both 2 member Electoral Divisions and 3 member Electoral Divisions, according to the number of electors in each. It is proposed, therefore, that all Electoral Divisions within the former Staffordshire County Council area are redesignated as 2 member Divisions, save for the following 8 Divisions which by reason of their size are redesignated as 3 member Divisions:

- Stone Urban: 12,276
- Stone Rural North: 12,011
- Biddulph South and Endon: 11,886

8. Option D

- Leek South: 11,579
- Kidsgrove: 11,249
- Cheadle and Checkley: 11,243
- Talke and Red Street: 11,236
- Churnet Valley: 11,034

The electorate of Stone Rural North Division will increase by the addition of electors from the remaining part of Stone Rural parish Council and Stone Urban Division by electors from St Michael's East Parish Ward of the Stone Town Council, further justifying the additional councillor in each

On the basis of the proposal above, 92 councillors will be elected to the new Council, with 44 elected from the former Stoke-on-Trent area and 48 from the former Staffordshire County Council area. This option, therefore, may be considered a pragmatic approach to seek to address many of the issues in the previous Options by: better securing effective electoral representation, with improved electoral equality for voters; ensuring effective and convenient local government; and avoiding the dominance of the former City Council in the new electoral arrangements.

The overall equality of electors to councillors in both new unitary council areas (4,500 to 1 and 4,461 to 1) demonstrates strong compliance with that criterion.

- **Criterion: Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area: Met**

Sensible geography

Local identity, culture and heritage

North Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance: Met

Housing supply

North Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply: Met

8. Option D

Sensible economic area

Sectoral analysis

North Staffordshire

Option D includes the electoral divisions of Stone Rural North (Stafford), Uttoxeter Rural, and Uttoxeter Town (East Staffordshire). The inclusion of the Stone Rural North electoral divisions within Option D means that a further section of the M6 between junction 15 and junction 14 will be included within the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

The inclusion of this section of the M6 will support the new North Staffordshire unitary council to unlock further strategic sites near the major M6 transport corridor.

- **Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas: Met**

Appropriate tax base

The tax base has been calculated by combining the collective Council Tax base (2025/26) and rateable value (business rates 2023) for each new unitary council.

The proportionate tax base per resident is lower in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire (1.07) compared to North Staffordshire (1.41). According to the current Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019), the combined population of North Staffordshire would exhibit a marginally greater level of health, skills, employment and crime deprivation. Deprivation in relation to the living environment would be at the same levels across

both councils, while deprivation relating to housing is slightly greater across Southern Staffordshire. It should be noted that for the majority of measures, variance in the levels of deprivation is only marginal (i.e. 1 point) and broadly in line with the national average. However, the new North Staffordshire unitary council would possess a proportionally lower tax base and experience a proportionally higher level of deprivation than the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council.

Proposals should not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area

Significant variance would exist between the respective tax bases of the new unitary councils, while levels of deprivation would be broadly similar across both authorities. This potentially creates the conditions for one new unitary holding an advantage over the other.

Further work is however required to understand the anticipated demand for CiC and adult social care services associated with each new unitary council. Given the current spend on social care services by existing unitary councils (c75% in many cases), the size and associated cost of each new unitary council's social care responsibilities would be a significant determining factor in creating any advantage / disadvantage between the two new unitary councils.

- **Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area: Partially met.**

Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks

Level of reserves compared to Council expenditure

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would possess reserves (excluding public health & schools) that amount to 140% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

The North Staffordshire unitary council's reserves would equate to 47% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

Borrowing as a proportion of reserves

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to significantly outperform the new North Staffordshire unitary council.

The Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 72% of general fund reserves.

The North Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 272% of general fund reserves.

Fees and charges to service expenditure ratio (CIPFA)

The new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council is forecast possess greater fees and charges generating capabilities, with 19% of the council's total service expenditure being covered by fees and charges.

North Staffordshire unitary council's fees and charges would amount to 16.8% of total service expenditure.

- **Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks**
 - North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
 - Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Met**

For areas covering councils that are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

- **Criterion: Proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing**
 - North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
 - Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Met**

8. Option D

Financial sustainability & high quality and sustainable public services

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

- North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Partially met**

Avoidance of service fragmentation

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services:

- North Staffordshire: **Partially met**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Partially met**

Opportunities for public service reform

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money:

- North Staffordshire: **Partially met - scope identified**
- Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Partially met - scope identified**

8. Option D

Ability to support devolution arrangements & enabling stronger community engagement

Ability of option to ‘unlock devolution’

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements: Met

Enabling strong community engagement

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment: Met

8. Option D

Overview of findings

A summary of the appraisal of Option D are provided below:

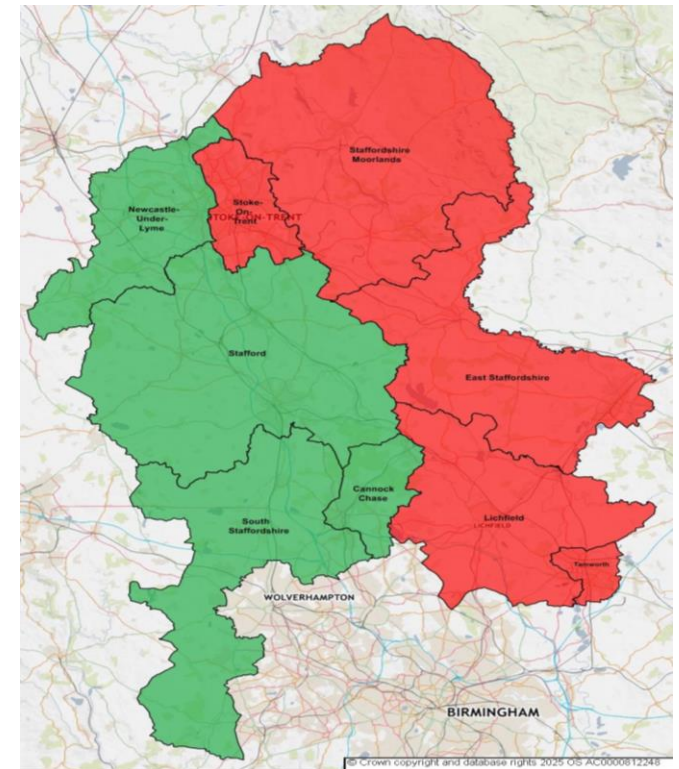
1. The establishment of a single tier of local government		2. The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.		3. Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.		4. Support devolution arrangements.		5. Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.	
Establish a single tier of local government		Must be the right size to withstand financial shocks	 	Improve local government and service delivery, avoiding fragmentation	 	New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements		Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	
Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000	 	Putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing	 	Opportunities for public service reform, including where they will lead to better value for money	 				
Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area		The right size to achieve efficiencies	 						
Local identity, cultural and historic importance									
Help to increase housing supply									
Proposals should be for sensible economic areas									
Appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage						Key: 1 = New North Staffordshire unitary council 2 = New Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council			

Section 9

Option E - Place profile and option analysis

9. Option E - Place profile and option analysis

Key	Proposed new unitary council	Area (km2)	Current population (2021)	Combined no. of Councillors
	West Staffordshire Cannock Chase District Council Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council South Staffordshire District Council Stafford Borough Council	1,295	471,179	33
	East Staffordshire East Staffordshire Borough Council Lichfield District Council Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Stoke City Council Tamworth Borough Council	1,418	663,330	73



9. Option E - Demographic and economic profile

DEMOGRAPHIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option E		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		West	East	
Demographics				
Area (km2)	576	1,295	1,418	2,713
Population	95,851	471,179	663,330	1,134,509
Age 0-15	15.6%	16.6%	18.6%	17.8%
Age 16-64	58.2%	61.1%	61.3%	61.2%
Age 65+	26.2%	22.4%	20%	21.0%
Population density (km2)	166	363.8	476.8	418
Index of Multiple Deprivation ('IMD')				
Health	6	6	5	IMD is a 10-point ranking system, A decile of 1 is the most deprived, and 10 is the least deprived
Skills	5	5	5	
Employ.	6	6	5	
Income	7	6	6	
Crime	8	7	6	
Housing	6	7	6	
Living env.	6	6	6	

ECONOMIC

Measure	SMDC current	Option E		Two-tier area (SCC & Stoke)
		West	East	
Economy				
Council Tax Base	34,382	159,631	290,926	369,557
GVA per hour	£29.20	£33.25	£34.32	£33.84
Gross median pay	£732.10	£716.05	£697.78	£705.90
Employmt. rate (16-64)	80.7%	78.45%	77.36%	77.8%
Economic activity (16-64)	82.8%	80.43%	79.86%	80.1%
% pop - Level 3 skills	53.6%	64.73%	59.72%	61.9%
% pop - Level 4 skills	32.8%	40.4%	40%	40.2%
% of low paid jobs	28.6%	22.08%	21.68%	21.9%
% of residents who travel less than 10km to work	10.3%	11.9%	12.8%	12.4%
% of residents who travel more than 10km to work	5.9%	4.8%	4.9%	4.8%
Housing target (up to 2035)	454	2,465	3,194	5,659
Employment land*	17.1ha	297ha	371.3ha	668.3ha

*Designated or available employment land as set out in each area’s Local Plan or Availability Assessment

9. Option E - Current democratic profile

	Population (2021)	Electorate	No. of County Councillors	Electorate per County Councillor	No. of Town and Parish Councils
WEST STAFFORDSHIRE	471,179	357,907	33	43,401	85
Cannock Chase District Council	100,529	76,864	7	10,981	8
Newcastle Under Lyme Borough Council	123,306	92,911	9	10,323	10
South Staffordshire District Council	110,474	85,917	8	10,740	27
Stafford Borough Council	136,870	102,215	9	11,357	40
EAST STAFFORDSHIRE	663,330	507,918	73	47,825	110
East Staffordshire Borough Council	124,019	90,657	9	10,073	38
Lichfield District Council	106,439	82,671	8	10,334	29
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council	95,851	77,056	7	11,008	43
Stoke City Council	258,375	197,984	44	4,500	0
Tamworth Borough Council	78,646	59,550	5	11,910	0

Population of new unitary councils

Option E would result in two unitary councils operating across the existing two-tier footprint. Both new unitary councils would retain Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's recognised boundaries, supporting the continuation of cooperation with other public sector organisations (ICB/ICS, Police and Crime Commissioner etc.).

Option E partially meets the LGR criteria's guiding principle for population size:

- West Staffordshire = c471,000.
- East Staffordshire = c663,330.

Recent updates relating to the MHCLG guidance state that the population guiding principle is not a hard target, with commissioning councils having the opportunity to demonstrate a compelling case for exemption during the development of the full LGR proposal.

- **Criterion: Proposals should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government: Met**
- **Criterion: Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000: Partially met**

Democratic representation

As with Options B to D, in the absence of a LGBCE review, there appears no alternative other than to leave the current Stoke-on-Trent wards/councillors untouched. Therefore, as before, the current ratio in Stoke-on-Trent City Council of 4,500 electors per councillor becomes the starting point for consideration of future arrangements for the East Staffordshire Council part of Option E.

In this option, in the proposed East Staffordshire Council, outside of Stoke-on-Trent, there will be 29 County Electoral Divisions in the Staffordshire Moorlands District, East Staffordshire Borough, Lichfield District and Tamworth Borough Council areas. Within these Divisions there is a disparity between the largest Division – The Cotes/Two Rivers in Tamworth Borough Council area at 12,435 electors, and the smallest Division – Lichfield Rural North in Lichfield District Council area at 8,675 electors.

As previously noted, this disparity between wards is also apparent in Stoke-on-Trent, with Dresden and Florence ward having only 3,680 electors. Again, to avoid over-representation in the current Stoke-on-Trent area, and relative under representation in the other areas contained within the proposal, and to ensure effective and convenient local government, it is necessary to consider redesignating the current County Electoral Divisions into multi-member wards. As noted above, even the smallest Electoral Division in the non-City area of the

proposed new Council has almost double the electorate of the average Stoke-on-Trent City ward. However, making each Electoral Division a 2 member ward (and arguably many should in fact be nearer 3 member wards to ensure some level of electoral equality across the new Council area) would create 58 councillors within these Divisions which, when added to the current number of 44 councillors in the Stoke-on-Trent City area, would create a Council of 102 councillors, which is in excess of the LGBCE's recommended usual upper boundary of 99 councillors.

In contrast with the above, Option E proposes a West Staffordshire Council which would contain 33 electoral Divisions in the Stafford Borough, Newcastle Under Lyme Borough, Cannock Chase District and South Staffordshire District Council areas. Within these Electoral Divisions there is also disparity between the largest Division – Stafford South East in Stafford Borough Council area at 12,580 electors, and the smallest Division – Brereton and Ravenhill in Cannock Chase District Council area at 8,618 electors. However, given the smaller number of Electoral Divisions to work with in this new Council area, it should be possible to create multi-member Divisions which better represent fair electoral arrangements while remaining easily within the LGBCE's upper limit of 99 councillors.

Given the issues highlighted above in relation to any electoral arrangements for the proposed East Staffordshire Council it is not considered that this option will provide appropriate and effective local government arrangements across the new electoral area.

- **Criterion: Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area: Not met**

Local identity, culture and heritage

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent share a deep and intertwined cultural identity rooted in their industrial heritage, creative traditions, and community values.

Specific to Option E, the areas of North and South Staffordshire are considered to possess stronger, more cohesive and distinct identities compared to East and West Staffordshire.

As outlined in previous sections, the identities of North and South Staffordshire options are summarised as:

- Communities across the north of the county possess a rich and distinctive local identity shaped by the area's industrial heritage, cultural traditions and a strong sense of community pride. Coal mining, ceramics, steelworks and canal transport have shaped the region's economy and landscape.
- Communities across mid and southern Staffordshire hold a distinct identity shaped by historic towns, royal connections, religious heritage and civic pride, distinct from the industrial character of North Staffordshire. Towns maintain strong local identities, often expressed through independent businesses, historic markets and community-led regeneration.

9. Option E

Sensible geography

By contrast, the proposed areas of West and East Staffordshire do not possess such distinct or coherent identities. The cultures, heritage and identities that characterise the populations of North and South Staffordshire would be split across the new West and East Staffordshire new unitary boundaries, resulting in (for example) communities in Stoke-on-Trent and Lichfield being part of the same council footprint.

Communities across the southern half of the new West Staffordshire unitary council (i.e. to Cannock, Stafford, and South Staffordshire) possess strong social and economic connections with Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and other parts of the West Midlands. Similarly, areas across the north of East Staffordshire share strong links to Greater Manchester.

Criterion: Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance: Not met

Housing supply

Staffordshire County Council does not produce a Local Plan. Instead, housing planning and delivery responsibilities lie with the district and borough councils within the county.

West Staffordshire

The West Staffordshire unitary council would implement a co-ordinated approach to addressing the issues of insufficient housing land supply being experienced by each district / borough council located within the council's boundary.

Several councils (South Staffordshire and Cannock Chase) are focused on reducing reliance on Green Belt land; a West Staffordshire wide approach would enable the identification of housing supply over a greater geographical area and offers greater scope for the development of affordable housing when compared to current arrangements.

East Staffordshire

The East Staffordshire unitary council would have the capability to identify and unlock cross-boundary (i.e. Staffordshire Moorlands/Stoke) housing sites and maximise the use of brownfield land. Similarly, a unified housing strategy across East Staffordshire could reduce planning uncertainty for developers, encouraging investment and speeding up delivery.

Each of the four borough and district councils that would constitute the new East Staffordshire unitary council are experiencing challenges associated with housing land supply; collectively the councils have a combined housing target of 3,194, below the required target. The establishment of a new East Staffordshire unitary council would enable a co-ordinated approach to addressing issues that are currently being addressed by councils individually.

Criterion: Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply: Met

9. Option E

Sensible economic area

Proposals should be for a sensible economic area

Comparison of areas

A summary of the characteristics across both new unitary council economies is provided below:

- Significant variance in the Council Tax Base (WS 159,631, ES 290,926).
- Broadly similar GVA per hour (WS: £33.25, ES: £34.32).
- Disparity in gross median pay (WS: £716.05, ES: £697.78).
- Similar rates of economic activity (WS: 78.45%, ES: 79.86%).
- Disparity in skills (Level 3) - (WS 65.73%, ES 59.72%).
- Similarly in skills (Level 4) - (WS 40.4%, ES 40%).
- Similar proportion of low paid jobs (WS: 22.08%, S&MS: 21.68%).

West Staffordshire

West Staffordshire is not currently recognised as either a formal or functional economic geography. The main economic sectors include retail and logistics (including a strong presence in Cannock Chase and Stafford, including retail parks and logistics hubs), engineering and manufacturing (South Staffordshire and Stafford - advanced manufacturing clusters), automotive, aerospace and energy technologies. Significant numbers of SMEs are based across the geography, whilst the area also hosts multinational companies including GE and Hitachi.

The area includes urban centres (Stafford, Cannock, Newcastle) and rural districts (South Staffordshire), offering a diverse economic landscape. This balance supports a mix of agri-tech, rural enterprise, and urban regeneration initiatives.

Shared challenges across the proposed new unitary council's economy include skills gaps (specifically technology and digital), infrastructure constraints and pressures on employment land (associated with housing and environmental constraints).

Areas including Cannock, Stafford, and South Staffordshire hold strong economic links with Birmingham, Wolverhampton, and other parts of the West Midlands Combined Authority area.

East Staffordshire

Although not recognised as a formal economic geography, the areas that would constitute East Staffordshire possess a diverse sector base including manufacturing, retail, logistics and professional services.

The economy of East Staffordshire includes urban centres such as Burton upon Trent and Tamworth, in addition to rural market towns and villages. East Staffordshire Borough Council's economy has a GDP of c£4.4 billion, which is the largest of all the councils across Staffordshire.

Both Lichfield and Tamworth are characterised by strong commuter economies with links to Birmingham and Deby. The economy of

9. Option E

Sensible economic area

Staffordshire Moorlands has a more rural focus, with strengths including agriculture, tourism and small-scale manufacturing.

The area maintains strong economic links to both the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and West Midlands Combined Authority areas, while also benefiting from key transport corridors (i.e. A38 and A50/A500) providing connections to Derby, Nottingham and the West Midlands that are considered as vital to enabling economic growth and innovation.

The economic area proposed within Option E faces challenges, including skills gaps (health, construction and technical), comparatively lower earnings (gross median pay) and business start-up rates below the national average.

East/West compared to North / South

Evidence indicates that a North / South split of the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent economy provides a more compelling argument in relation to sensible economic geographies:

- Economic data demonstrates that North Staffordshire is a cohesive economic geography which has formed around the economic needs and activities created within Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, the market towns of the Staffordshire Moorlands and other smaller settlements. The geography is also aligned to housing market areas.
- The local authority areas in the south of the county have strong links with the West Midlands conurbation, including high levels of in/out commuting, and high levels of visitor flows for retail and leisure opportunities. Four of the six councils co-founded the GBSLEP and

some are non-constituent members of the WMCA.

Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas: Partially met

Appropriate tax base

The tax base has been calculated by combining the collective Council Tax base (2025/26) and rateable value (business rates 2023) for each new unitary council.

The proportionate tax base per resident is broadly similar across both new unitary councils, however East Staffordshire (1.28) demonstrates a marginally greater ability to generate tax per resident than a new West Staffordshire unitary council (1.21).

According to the current Indices of Multiple Deprivation (2019), West Staffordshire's population will experience a marginally higher level of deprivation compared to those in East Staffordshire (specifically in relation to health, employment, crime and housing).

However, given the small scale differences in proportionate tax base and levels of anticipated deprivation / inequality between the two new unitary authorities, it is not anticipated that establishing the new councils would create new areas of disadvantage.

- **Criterion: Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area: Met**

Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks

Level of reserves compared to Council expenditure

The new West Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to outperform the East Staffordshire unitary council.

The new West Staffordshire unitary council would possess reserves (excluding public health & schools) that amount to 62% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

In comparison, East Staffordshire unitary council's reserves equate to 48.1% of the council's net revenue expenditure.

Borrowing as a proportion of reserves

The new West Staffordshire unitary council is forecast to outperform the East Staffordshire unitary council.

West Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 74% of general fund reserves.

In comparison, East Staffordshire unitary council's borrowing would equate to 174% of general fund reserves.

Fees and charges to service expenditure ratio (CIPFA)

Both new unitary councils would generate a similar level of fees and charges compared to their respective levels of service expenditure (West Staffordshire 19.6%, East Staffordshire 18.6%).

- **Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to withstand financial shocks**
 - **West Staffordshire: Met**
 - **East Staffordshire : Not met**

For areas covering councils that are in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing

Stoke on Trent Council received £21.7m of exceptional financial support in 2024/25, in addition to £20.5m of similar support received in 2023/24.

There is no Government proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation.

Option E would result in the responsibility for Stoke City Council's liabilities associated with the Exceptional Financial Support transferring to the new East Staffordshire unitary council. As demonstrated by the previous criteria, East Staffordshire unitary council's ability to withstand financial shocks is already challenged.

As outlined within previous options, the requirement for disaggregation of Staffordshire County Council's social care and the aggregation of the East Staffordshire element with Stoke City Council's social care functions would be complex and incur cost.

9. Option E

Financial sustainability

Given that aggregation of social care functions will take place across Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council's social care provision, opportunities to reform these functions would exist. The new East Staffordshire unitary council could commit to a 'transformational' LGR process which would identify opportunities for innovation across Children's Services and Adult Social Care, rather than aim for a 'safe and legal' service. This could involve Stoke City Council's current transformation programme extending into the new unitary council.

A reconfiguration of services to focus on a neighbourhood model that prioritises (for example) prevention through person centred services and system wide collaboration has the potential to realise both meaningful impact and cost avoidance across the system.

These efficiencies would be in addition to Stoke City Council's current plans to ensure internal efficiencies to enable the repayment of Exceptional Financial Support.

Given that proposals for a new East Staffordshire unitary council's social care operating model and plans for system wide transformation are currently not known, it is currently unclear whether the new council would be in a position to sustain the liabilities associated with Stoke's Exceptional Financial Support.

Additionally, the costs associated with establishing the new unitary council would be the responsibility of the council, meaning that cost pressures (in addition to repaying the Exceptional Financial Support) would be created.

- **Criterion: Proposals should demonstrate how reorganisation will contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing**

- **West Staffordshire: Met**
- **East Staffordshire: Not met**

Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

- **Criterion: Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies**

- **West Staffordshire: Partially met**
- **East Staffordshire: Partially met**

Avoidance of service fragmentation

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

- **Criterion: Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services:**
 - West Staffordshire: **Partially met**
 - East Staffordshire: **Partially met**

Opportunities for public service reform

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

- **Criterion: Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money:**
 - North Staffordshire: **Partially met - scope identified**
 - Southern and Mid-Staffordshire: **Partially met - scope identified**

9. Option E

Ability to support devolution arrangements & enabling stronger community engagement

Ability of option to ‘unlock devolution’

Implementing Option E would replace existing two-tier local government arrangements within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent, thus simplifying governance and the management of devolved powers.

As evidenced within this appraisal, there exists a clear case for a (i) sub-regional and (ii) regional approach to transport, skills and employment, housing and economic development.

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements: Met

Enabling strong community engagement

Please refer to the analysis provided for Option B.

Criterion: New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment: Met

9. Option E

Overview of findings

A summary of the appraisal of Option E are provided below:

1. The establishment of a single tier of local government		2. The right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks		3. Prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens		4. Support devolution arrangements		5. Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	
Establish a single tier of local government		Must be the right size to withstand financial shocks	 	Improve local government and service delivery, avoiding fragmentation	 	New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements		Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment	
Each new unitary council to have a population of 500,000	 	Putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing	 	Opportunities for public service reform, including where they will lead to better value for money	 				
Ensuring effective democratic representation for all parts of the area		The right size to achieve efficiencies	 						
Local identity, cultural and historic importance									
Help to increase housing supply									
Proposals should be for sensible economic areas									
Appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage						Key: 1 = New West Staffordshire unitary council 2 = New East Staffordshire unitary council			

Section 10

Summary of findings and conclusions

10. Summary of findings and conclusions

Option A

The implementation of Option A would require the least amount of change and would therefore be the least costly to establish. It would however result in a unitary council (Stoke City Council) not meeting the 500,000 population guiding principle. Challenges would exist in establishing structures across Staffordshire that reflect and respect the separate identities of north and south Staffordshire's communities; Option A is outperformed by all other options in terms of enabling effective community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment.

While a new Staffordshire unitary authority would possess the collective strength to continue to reform the sub-region's economy, given the economy's diversity and location specific challenges/needs, options B and D provide more effective alternatives to defining a sensible economic geography.

Option A ensures that Stoke City Council's current financial challenges are contained, however the scope and scale of transformation, public service reform and the ability to realise significant efficiencies is limited by the lack of opportunity to aggregate social care services and other statutory functions currently delivered by Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council. This lack of aggregation would however avoid service fragmentation and ensure service continuity.

The option would realise efficiencies associated with the aggregation of functions and services currently delivered by the district and borough councils operating across Staffordshire. The existence of two unitary councils would create the conditions to help unlock devolution.

Option B

Option B would create new unitary councils operating across sensible economic geographies, however the new North Staffordshire unitary council would not meet the 500,000 population guiding principle. A democratic disparity would also exist given the significantly lower number of electors represented per Stoke councillor compared to those across the rest of North Staffordshire.

A degree of disadvantage would exist through the differing tax bases and anticipated higher levels of health deprivation (both favouring Southern and Mid-Staffordshire over North Staffordshire). Further work is required to understand the anticipated demand for CiC and adult social care services associated with each new unitary council.

The inclusion of Stoke and the transferring of a proportion of the county council's current liabilities to the new Northern Staffordshire unitary council create the conditions for potential financial stress, although the aggregation of Stoke City Council and (a proportion of) Staffordshire County Council's social care operating models provides the opportunity for service reform and the realisation of efficiencies. However, the disaggregation of the county council's social care functions (in addition to other statutory functions) creates complexity, service fragmentation and risks incurring significant cost and challenges to service continuity.

Option B would provide the conditions to support the unlocking of devolution, as well as providing the basis for structures that would better support community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment compared to Option A.

10. Summary of findings and conclusions

Option C

Similar to Option B, Option C would create new unitary councils operating across a sensible geography. However, the majority of East Staffordshire is clearly part of the Southern Staffordshire economy, meaning that while the creation of Option C would benefit the new North Staffordshire unitary authority, potentially disadvantaging the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire economy; as such proposals within Option C are not considered to be a wholly sensible economic geography.

Additionally, a democratic disparity would exist in terms of electors per councillor across Stoke and North Staffordshire. The proportionate tax base per resident is broadly similar across both new unitary councils, while levels of deprivation would be similar and mainly below national averages.

The financial sustainability of Option C is similar to Option B; the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would represent a council more equipped to withstand financial shocks, however the North Staffordshire unitary council would possess greater potential to realise efficiencies (through the aggregation of statutory functions and services currently delivered by the city and county council). Further work is however required to understand the anticipated demand for CiC and adult social care services associated with each new unitary council.

Option C (and Options B and D) would create the conditions for effective community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment. Each of these options would likely be effective in supporting the unlocking of devolution.

Option D

Similar to Option B, Option D would create new unitary councils operating across sensible economic geographies. Variance would exist between the respective tax bases of the new unitary councils, while levels of deprivation would be broadly similar across both authorities. This potentially creates the conditions for one new unitary holding an advantage over the other.

The financial sustainability of Option D is similar to Options B and C; the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council would represent a council more equipped to withstand financial shocks, however the North Staffordshire unitary council would possess greater potential to realise efficiencies. Additionally, further work is however required to understand the anticipated demand for CiC and adult social care services associated with each new unitary council.

Options B, C and D provide the strongest evidence of arrangements to support effective community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment. Additionally, each of these options would likely be effective in supporting the unlocking of devolution compared to Option A.

Options B, C and D possess an inherent risk specific to the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council. Although elements of the county council's existing statutory service delivery model (senior officers, service managers and front line staff) would transfer to the new Southern and Mid-Staffordshire unitary council, the constituent borough and district councils that will make up the new unitary will possess limited experience of delivering a 'one council' approach that involves the delivering statutory people service functions (i.e. Children's Services and adult social care).

10. Summary of findings and conclusions

Option E

Option E would result in two unitary councils operating across the existing two-tier footprint. Both new unitary councils would retain Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's recognised boundaries, supporting the continuation of cooperation with other public sector organisations (ICB/ICS, Police and Crime Commissioner etc.).

West Staffordshire would not however meet the LGR guiding principle for population size, while democratic arrangements across East Staffordshire are not considered to provide appropriate and effective local government arrangements across the new electoral area (with significant over representation of electorate in Stoke-on-Trent, compared to other areas across the new East Staffordshire unitary council).

The areas of North and South Staffordshire are considered to possess stronger, more cohesive and distinct identities. Additionally, the new unitary areas of West Staffordshire and East Staffordshire are not currently recognised as either formal or functional economic geographies.

The inclusion of Stoke and the transferring of a proportion of the county council's current liabilities to the new East Staffordshire unitary council create the conditions for potential financial stress, although the aggregation of Stoke City Council and (a proportion of) Staffordshire County Council's social care operating models provides the opportunity for service reform and the realisation of efficiencies.

Option E would provide the conditions to support the unlocking of devolution, as well as providing the basis for structures that would better support community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment compared to Option A.

10. Summary of findings and conclusions

Key:

Option A

- 1 = New Staffordshire unitary council
- 2 = Stoke City Council

Options B-D

- 1 = New North Staffordshire unitary council
- 2 = Southern and Mid Staffordshire unitary council

Option E

- 1 = New West Staffordshire unitary council
- 2 = New East Staffordshire unitary council

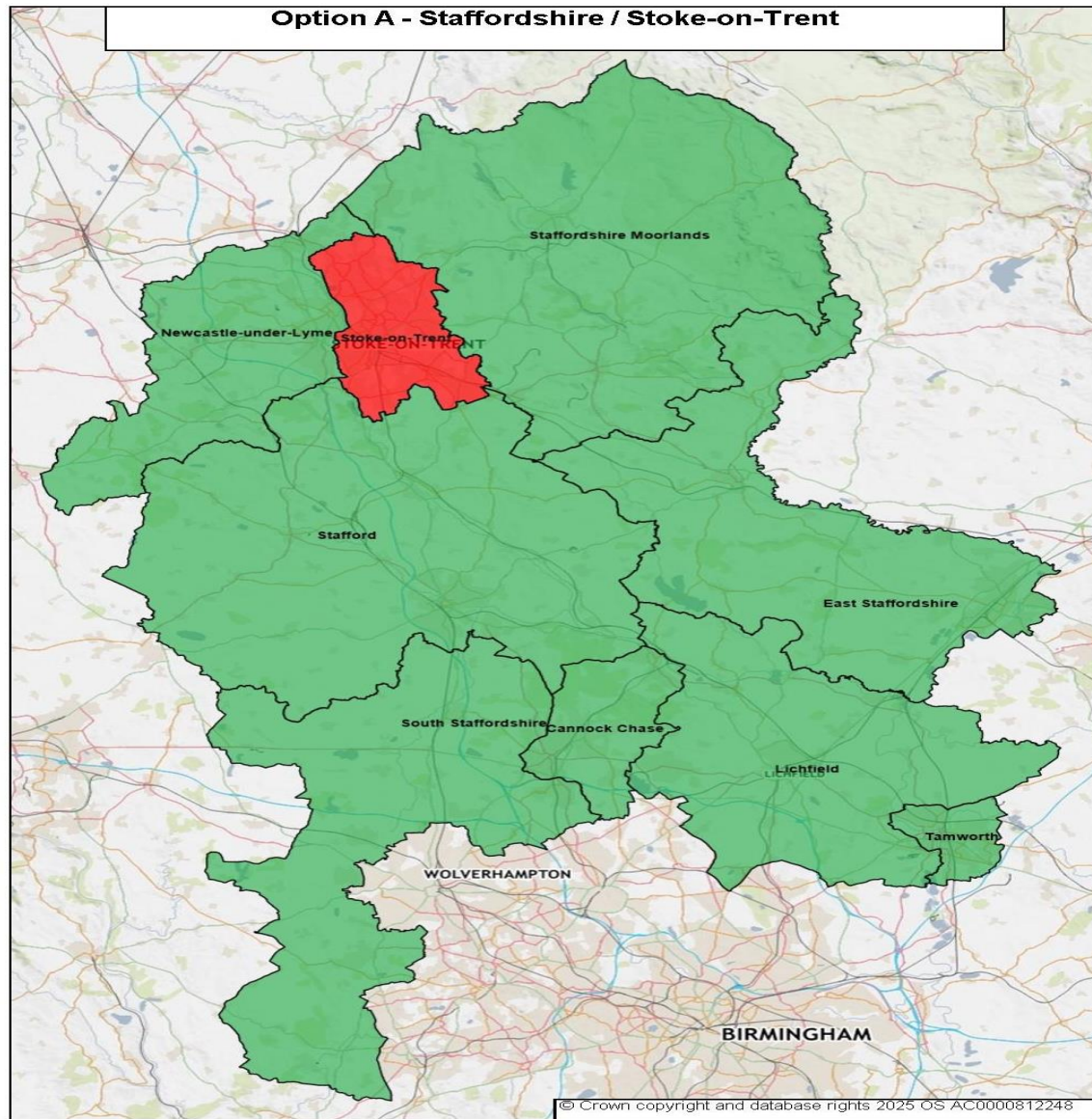
Establishment of a single tier of local government - sensible geographic and economic areas								Efficiencies &ability to withstand financial shocks		High quality & sustainable public services		Support devolution arrangements	Community engagement & neighbour. empower.
													
Establish a single tier of local government	Meets 500,000 population	Democratic representation	Local identity, culture etc.	Increase housing supply	Sensible economic area	Appropriate tax base & not creating disadvantages areas	Right size to withstand financial shocks	Exceptional Financial Support - firmer footing	Right size to achieve efficiencies	Improved service delivery and avoidance of fragmentation	Deliver public service reform & VfM	Support devolution arrangements	Enable stronger community engagement and neighbourhood empowerment
	 						 	 	 				
	 						 	 	 	 	 		
	 						 	 	 	 	 		
	 						 	 	 	 	 		
	 						 	 	 	 	 		

Appendix A

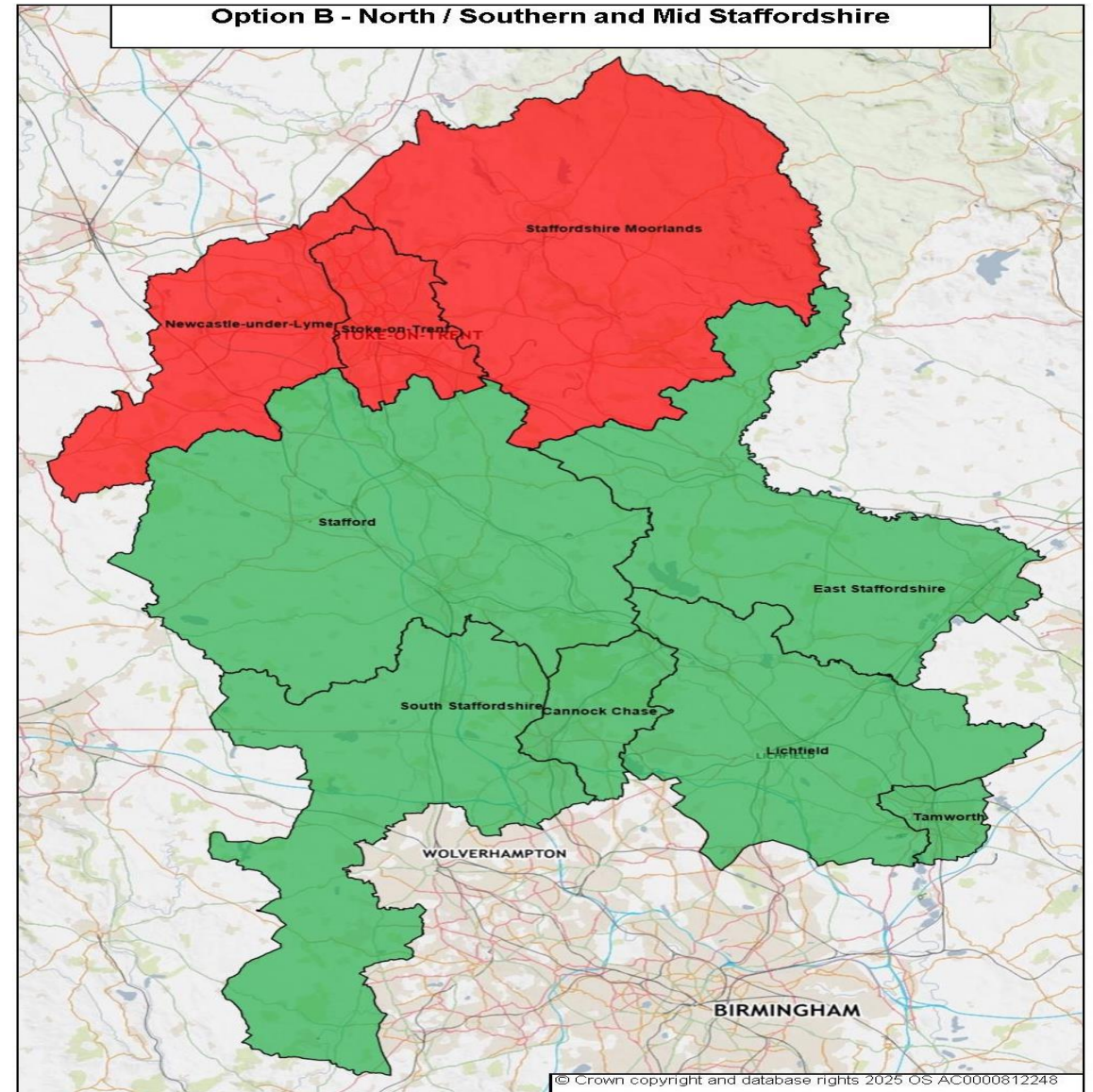
LGR option maps

Appendix A - LGR option maps

Option A

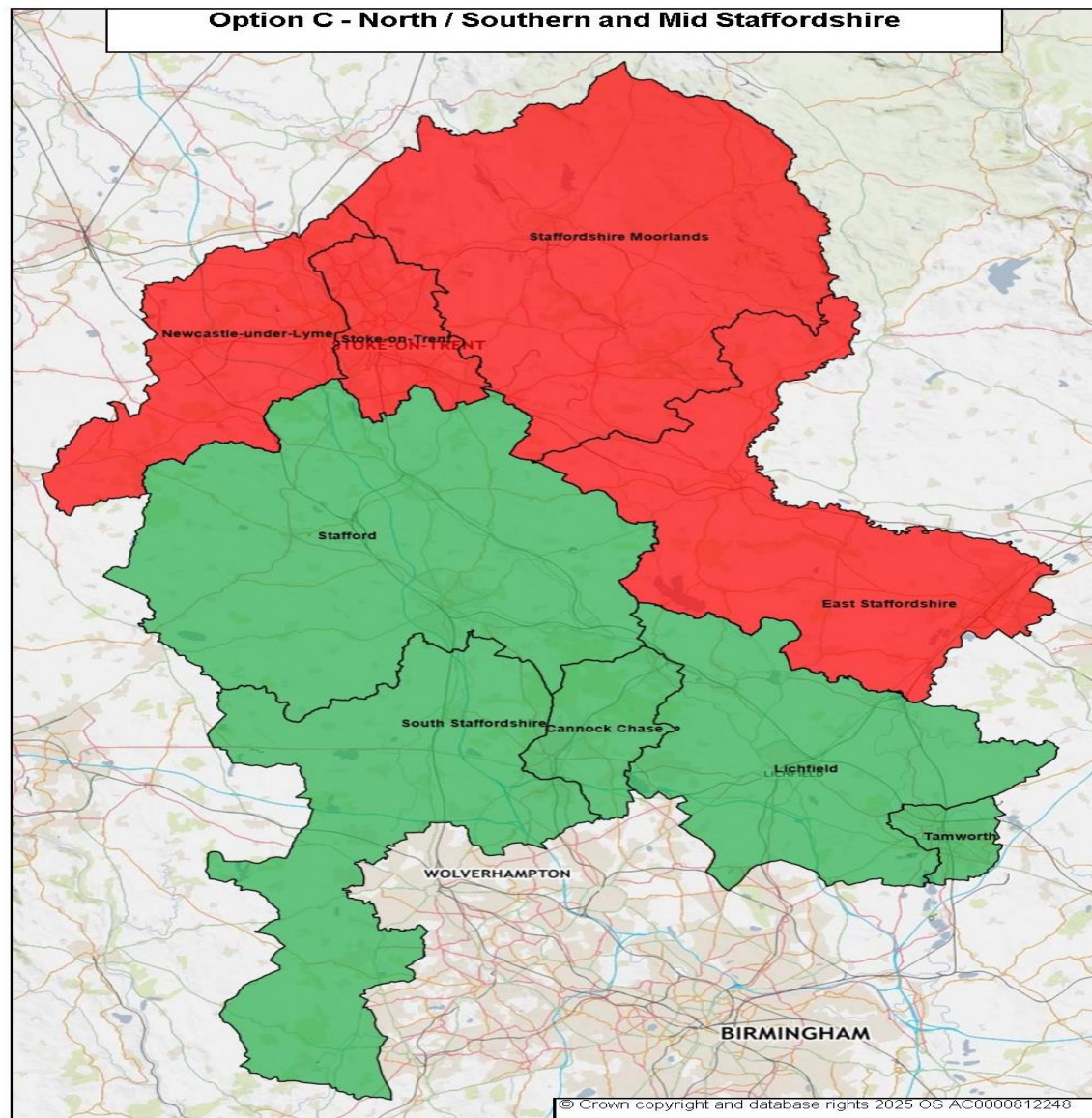


Option B

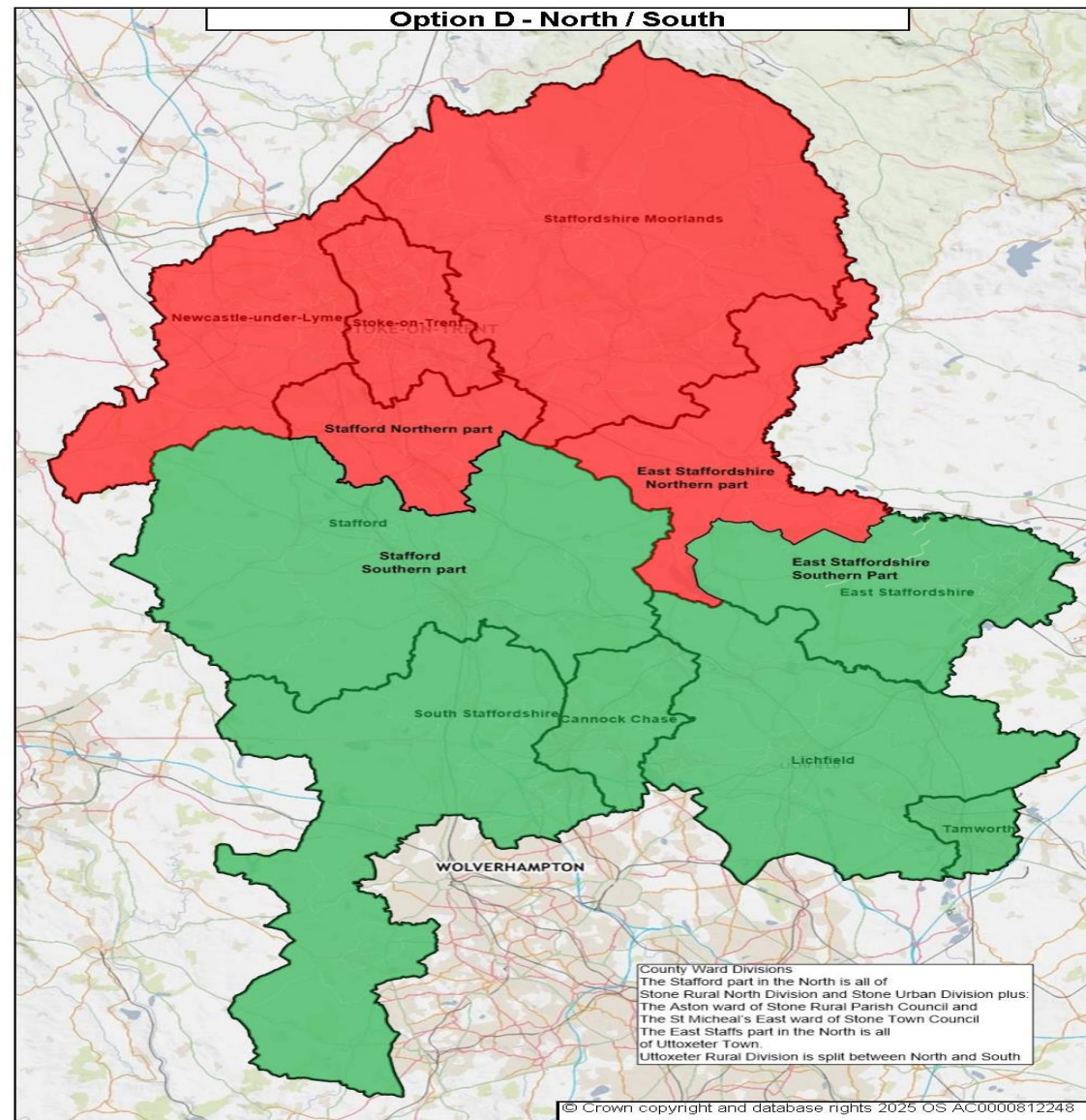


Appendix A - LGR option maps

Option C

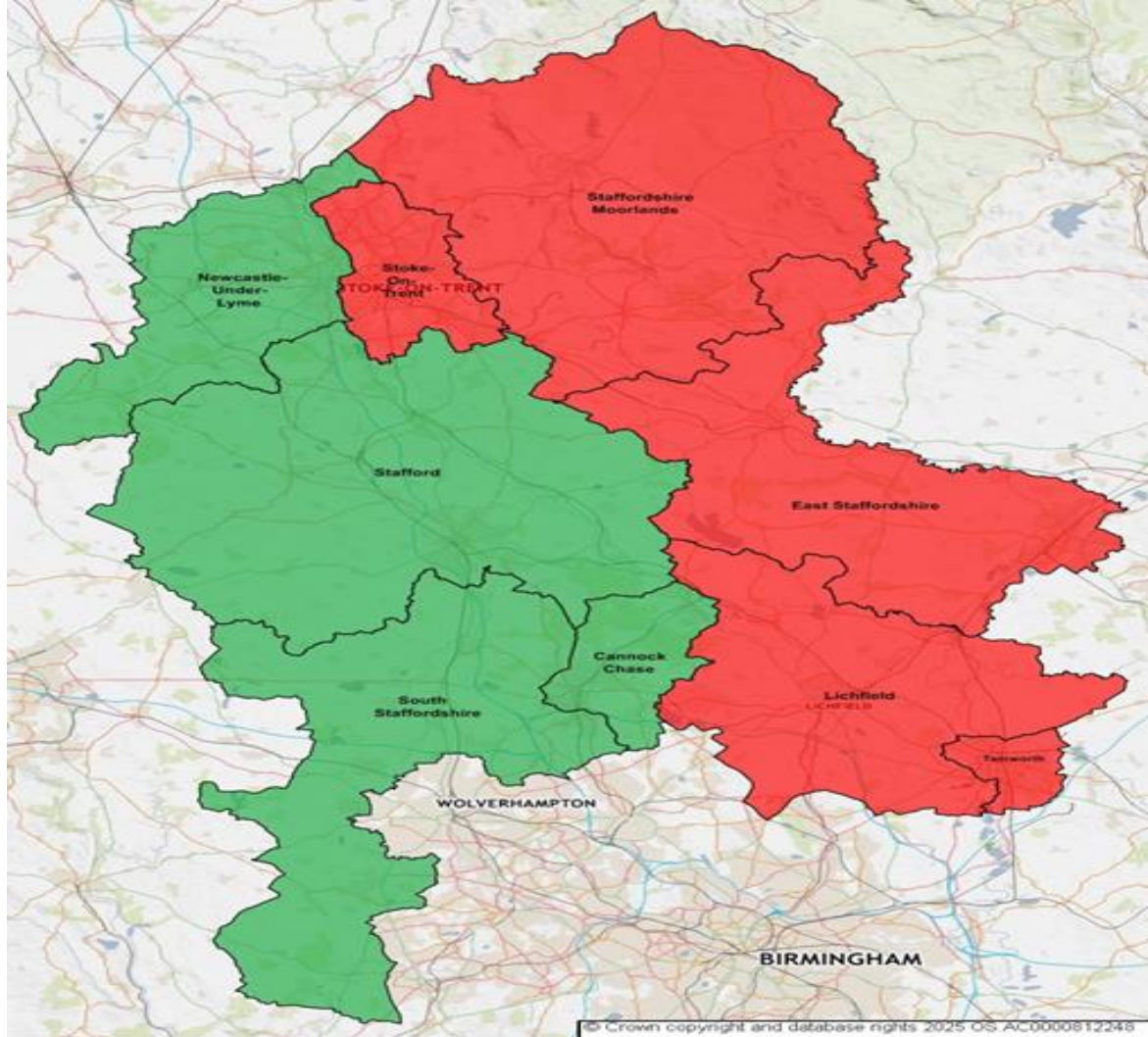


Option D



Appendix A - LGR option maps

Option E



Appendix C

Options Appraisal – Financial Assessment

Financial appraisal

Introduction

The purpose of this Financial Appraisal is to:

- Understand the financial sustainability of the options for local government reorganisation in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent.
- Ensure that local government in the whole of Staffordshire in a future configuration is financially viable.
- Deliver long-term and measurable financial benefits, value for money and efficiency with a balance to ensure success in one element of the structure is not at the expense of another.
- Considering the alliance of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and High Peak Borough Council, include in the assessment the impact of this unique arrangement that spans two county boundaries which are both affected by LGR.

The aim of the appraisal is to assess, across a reasonable period, what the net effect of the changes will be for each new unitary and Staffordshire as whole. To this end, the **Financial Objectives** are to achieve:

1).	Individual and cross-Staffordshire financial sustainability .
2).	To have a balance to the financial strength and sustainability of the new entities which will give the best platform for them to serve Staffordshire as a whole.
3).	Value for money by driving change at the minimum cost necessary and deriving efficiencies through greater economies of scale, removing waste and duplicate expenditure and making considered investment in people, technology, and processes.

Summary of the Financial Appraisal of the Options for Local Government Reorganisation

Following the assessment of the available options against the criteria for unitary local government, financial appraisals have been undertaken for the following shortlisted options:

Option B 	North Staffordshire Newcastle-under-Lyme Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Cannock Chase East Staffordshire Lichfield South Staffordshire Stafford Tamworth	Population North Staffordshire 477,500 Southern and Mid-Staffordshire 656,800 
Option D 	North Staffordshire East Staffordshire (Part) Newcastle-under-Lyme Stafford (Part) Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent Southern and Mid-Staffordshire East Staffordshire (Part) Cannock Chase Lichfield South Staffordshire Stafford (Part) Tamworth	Population North Staffordshire 536,172 Southern and Mid-Staffordshire 598,128 
Option E 	Staffordshire East East Staffordshire Lichfield Staffordshire Moorlands Stoke-on-Trent Tamworth Staffordshire West Cannock Chase Newcastle-under-Lyme South Staffordshire Stafford	Population East Staffordshire 663,330 West Staffordshire 471,179 

To undertake the financial appraisal, each of the three options above were assessed using the three key elements set out below.

Gross Annual Savings - consolidating each of the existing local authorities in each of the options to two unitary councils will yield savings that will be annual. Savings have been calculated that are realistic and achievable, including the consolidation of leadership and senior management and areas of operations that are considered to offer opportunities for cost reductions from the current delivery model.

Implementation Costs - to form the new entities creating the platform to deliver high quality public services efficiently will require a series of one-off or time-restricted costs such as technology platform integration, staff redundancy, programme and project management, professional development, and professional fees.

Disaggregation Costs - changing from two upper tier authorities with eight districts and boroughs and an existing unitary to options of two larger unitary authorities will incur costs of disaggregation from the division of county-level services, including costs of new leadership and management structures.

The net effect of the Implementation Costs and the Annual Benefits derives a 'Net Benefit' figure that quantifies how the changes will affect the financial position across an eight year operation of the new arrangements following an initial 'Base Year' in 2026/27 and a 'Shadow Year' in 2027/28, ten years in total. Within this calculation, two additional measures have been calculated:

The '**Payback Period**'; the number of years it will take for the cumulative implementation costs to meet the cumulative benefits.

The '**Balance of Benefits**'; gives a ratio showing how the assessed options are balanced between the two new unitarities. The nearer to 50:50 (a differential of 0) the better, as this provides an equilibrium that minimises the risk of one new unitary being financially weaker than its partner and undermining the financial sustainability for Staffordshire as a whole.

The key results of the analysis for the three options assessed are shown below.

Option	Implementation Costs	Combined Payback Period	Net Benefit Over 10 Years	Balance of benefits between Unitary 1 & 2
	£m	Year	£m	% (differential)
Option B	214	3.8	318	48.8:51.2 (2.4)
Option D	215	3.9	306	50.8:49.2 (1.6)
Option E	211	4.3	278	67.2:32.8 (34.4)

Financial sustainability for the whole of Staffordshire is a critical component of this proposal. The financial implications of the three options assessed have been considered from the perspective of all components of the new unitary authorities. Delivering quantifiable financial benefits that are underpinned by long-term financial sustainability, resilience, and value for money that is balanced between the new unitaries and benefits the whole of Staffordshire is at the heart of the financial assessment of this proposal.

The analysis is structured, based on available evidence that quantifies the costs and benefits and provides a basis on which to assess each option in full, i.e. unitary 1 in any configuration may show positive financial results but are they balanced with unitary 2 and vice versa. This helps in answering the

question of whether the individual parts and the whole of Staffordshire yield a net benefit.

By understanding where there is duplication of costs, opportunities for efficiencies to deliver savings, and unlock growth provides a basis for identifying income opportunities and savings. Adding to this with the knowledge that deriving the savings will require increased focus, effort, and cost from upfront investment means that the financial assessment is considered and holistic in its approach. Weighing these factors over a realistic assessment period demonstrates whether each option is more financially resilient and sustainable than the current configuration. The financial analysis provides insight to:

- The monetary impact of the reorganisation options;
- Comparisons of the assessed options on a like-for-like basis;
- The financial viability and strength of the assessed options; and
- The key assumptions, modelling approach, and consistency of application for all options and elements.

Methodology and Key Assumptions

The financial analysis is rigorous, follows a structured methodology that applies the learning from other Local Government Reorganisation processes, aligns with Government guidance and is applied across each assessed option consistently. The steps taken to undertake the analysis were:

1). Scope and methodology

- Agreement of the options to be modelled.
- Approach to the treatment of shared services, disaggregation and harmonisation agreed.

2). Data collection and validation

- Use of Revenue Outturn (RO) information for 2024/25.
- Use of Council Tax Requirement Returns (CTR1) for 2025/26.
- Gathered available information on revenue budgets, reserves, capital plans, balance sheets, and key service metrics.
- Gathered other contextual information to understand cost pressures, risks, and transformation plans.

3). Analysis template

- A consolidated financial template was developed that combines district, unitary, and county budgets into unified figures based on the agreed assumptions (e.g., population apportionment).

4). Estimate of savings

- Applied top-down models to estimate savings across key categories of:
 - Senior management and democratic service 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 direct (cashable) and enabling (efficiency) savings.
- Employed local inputs and benchmark data from other Local Government Reorganisation programmes to calibrate assumptions.

5). Estimate of implementation costs

- Identified one-off costs required to deliver reorganisation, including:
 - Programme management and transition team costs
 - Redundancy and pension strain
 - ICT integration or separation
 - Property and rebranding
 - Legal and governance setup
- Costs were phased over an 8-year period after a 'shadow year', with timing aligned to implementation assumptions

6). Scenario modelling for each option

- Input to the template to ensure each option followed a structured financial model that calculated:
 - Annual and cumulative savings

- Phased implementation costs
- Year-on-year net benefit
- Breakeven year
- Total net financial benefit
- Balance between entities in the option

7). Quality assurance and review

- Internal review of the models and the options assessed
- External independent review of key assumptions and their application

Elements Considered in the Financial Assessment

The financial analysis integrates all inputs and assumptions grouped into two main elements:

Recurring savings: Cashable savings that will be derived once reorganisation is in place. Savings include workforce reductions at the leadership and senior management level, systems rationalisation, contract management, and operating model changes. Savings are categorised by source, with baselines derived from the existing budgets.

Implementation costs: Costs required to implement the preferred options, typically incurred over the first four years. These include programme delivery, ICT, staff redundancy, estates changes, and transitional double running.

Modelling Approach

Undertaking a multi-year forecast carries inherent risks such as:

- for savings and costs;
- for unknown factors; and
- in optimism and pessimism biases.

To mitigate these risks, the approach followed previous local government reorganisation models, methodologies, and assumptions working on a 'Midpoint' position to give the most likely scenario across the period. The Midpoint attempts to ensure a prudent approach to savings estimates balanced with an equally prudent assessment of benefits. Applying these principles consistently establishes a position where there is an ability to compare one option with another on a like-for-like basis. This informs consideration and discussion on the financial merits of each option, the advantages of one option over another, how risk may impact an option, the question and importance of balance and the achievement of value for money within and across options.

The key principles have been applied consistently, and it is essential that the specific configuration of an option includes estimates that may be unique or particular to its achievement. As an example, the modification in Option D is likely to incur additional disaggregation costs for the eastern and western edges of the modified boundary, these costs have been assessed and incorporated into the Option D appraisal.

Outputs

The financial assessment calculated for each option the following:

- Gross and net annual savings
- Cumulative implementation costs
- Payback period (breakeven year)
- Total net benefit over ten years (a ‘base year’, a ‘shadow year’ plus eight operating years)
- A measure of balance between the new entities within an option as a ratio
- These outputs inform the financial assessment and analysis of each option.

Financial Implications

This section brings together detailed evidence and modelling outputs across all relevant dimensions of Local Authority finance giving a high-level perspective on the net financial benefit, period over which implementation costs will be covered by savings, and how balanced the options are. It consolidates and covers the financial profile of the new unitary Councils, how they commence, develop, and grow to an operational state. It includes the scale and timing of anticipated savings and implementation costs. Two key measures of success are:

- the **payback period**, which calculates the time for the new entities, individually and collectively, will cover their implementation costs and then develop reserves to enable the new entities to invest, grow, and manage financial risks; and
- the **financial balance** across the new entities, which shows how new entities across Staffordshire will be financially balanced so that local government in Staffordshire as whole delivers quality services, is able to invest in growth for all residents, and that both entities will have the financial bandwidth necessary to sustain themselves individually.

Considering these measures together enables a judgement on the long-term financial viability of the new structure and how it compares to the current configuration, and whether each option will deliver financial benefits for the whole of Staffordshire.

This section is organised into four sub-sections:

- 1).

Savings and efficiencies: estimates of recurrent savings achievable from reorganisation including staff, systems, governance, and estate rationalisation.
- 2).

Implementation costs: A breakdown of the implementation costs necessary to achieve the reorganisation including redundancy, ICT, and programme delivery.
- 3).

Breakeven and payback period: An analysis that measures the net financial benefit of reorganisation over a ten-year period and illustrates improved fiscal resilience.
- 4).

Other considerations: Consideration of other financial factors alongside the impact of transformation.

Each element shows financial inputs, analytical findings, with narrative to explain and aid understanding. This section, therefore, forms the key drivers and outcomes of the financial case for reorganisation in Staffordshire. It provides the information necessary for decision-makers and stakeholders to have a clear and comprehensive view of the financial implications of the proposal. Following a structured approach, utilising well-understood and trialled methodologies for previous cases for change in local government, it takes the reader through the key assumptions, impacts in each new unitary entity transparently and how this will affect Staffordshire as a whole. Collectively, this demonstrates the options that are financially feasible, shows financial benefits and value for money and which have the balance necessary to ensure that the whole of Staffordshire will be best served by the proposed changes and which options best manage to achieve this.

Summary

A summary of the financial assessment is outlined below. Further information regarding the estimated recurring savings and one-off implementation costs are outlined in the subsequent sections and the Financial Appendices.

Overall, the financial analysis shows that Option B provides a reasonable and sound base financial position. There is a payback across the whole of Staffordshire in Year 3.8 with annualised net benefits from this point onwards. The North Staffordshire Unitary in this option has a payback year of 3.2 and the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary taking longer to achieve payback in year 4.3. Option E has a payback year of 4.3 overall and shows net benefits from there onwards. The Eastern Unitary pays back in 3.3 years and the Western Unitary 5.2 years, this divergence continues thereafter with a much stronger East Unitary accelerating beyond its Western neighbour throughout the assessment period giving rise to a significant financial imbalance.

Building on the positives of a base position suggested by Option B, Option D has a similar overall payback year of 3.9 years; 3.3 years for the North Staffordshire Unitary and 4.3 years for the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary. Enhancing the northern area gives much greater balance to the financial position of Option D with 50.8% of the Net Benefits in the Northern Authority and 49.2% in the South. This provides for a better balance than Option B (48.7% in the North and 51.3% in the South, a differential of 2.6)) setting a position of a more financially sustainable solution for Staffordshire as a whole.

For Option D there is a positive net financial impact over ten years of £306.2 million, giving a robust position on which the two new unitaries can plan to deliver excellent public services across the whole of Staffordshire, giving room for them to invest and grow.

Annual Savings in Year 5 (increasing thereafter)	£69.0m
Cumulative Net Benefit Across Staffordshire (10 years)	£306.2m
Payback Period – Staffordshire	3.9 years
Northern Authority	3.3 years
Southern Authority	4.3 years
Balance of benefit between the North Staffordshire Unitary and Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary (differential in brackets)	50.8:49.2 (1.6)

Cost Savings

The consolidation into fewer entities will yield savings from service integration efficiencies, workforce reductions, streamlined governance, sharing and consolidating support services and sharing infrastructure. The assessment is developed from top-down modelling and local data inputs.

These savings are generated in all assessed options as follows:

Option	Total saving over 10 Years	Equivalent annual saving
	£m	£m
Option B	532	59
Option D	521	58
Option E	488	54

The breakdown of the £521m cost savings for Option D are shown in the table below:

Saving Category	North Staffordshire Unitary Savings	Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Savings	TOTAL Savings
	£m	£m	£m
Consolidating leadership and senior management across the councils - reduction of Chief Executives	3.04	7.54	10.58
Initial wider workforce savings due to consolidation - senior officers >£50k	6.59	15.35	21.93
Initial wider workforce savings due to consolidation - other officers >£50k	0.83	2.16	2.99
Initial non-staffing expenditure savings due to consolidation	12.71	12.60	25.31
Savings from reducing the number of councillors	12.64	24.82	37.46
Savings from reducing the number of local elections	2.74	3.19	5.92
Wider workforce expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone - other officers >£50k	0.80	2.67	3.47
Wider workforce expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone - officers <£50k	1.12	2.76	3.88



Saving Category	North Staffordshire Unitary Savings	Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary Savings	TOTAL Savings
Reduction in non-staffing expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone	4.79	4.75	9.55
Reduction in property revenue costs through consolidating existing local authority operational estate	5.09	12.51	17.60
A modest increase proposed for sales, fees, and charges income through harmonisation	38.02	42.04	80.07
Council Tax Harmonisation	143.52	158.79	302.31
TOTAL	231.90	289.17	521.07

Implementation Costs

There are one-off costs required to implement the reorganisation, including programme delivery, systems integration, estates changes, and workforce exit costs. These costs are necessary to deliver the new entities and ensure they are configured to deliver long-term benefits. To achieve this will involve one-off transition costs associated with redistribution of county upper tier services to the new unitary, such as reconfiguring finance and HR systems, creating new organisational structures and establishing democratic and corporate capacity. As such, there is no additional recurring expenditure that is expected. The peak years for these costs are expected to be in years 1-4 with a rapid reduction from then onwards. However, the nature of some elements, such as asset rationalisation, will take several more years to achieve optimisation so, to be prudent, related costs have been included for the entire assessment period.

These implementation costs in all assessed options are as follows:

Option	Total Implementation Cost over 10 Years
	£m
Option B	214
Option D	215
Option E	211

The total estimated implementation cost for Option B is £214m, Option D £215m and Option E £211m over a period of ten years (including a 'Base Year' in 2026/27, then a 'Shadow Year' and eight years post implementation operating years). These costs are necessary to establish the new entities and release the savings opportunities described above. For this reason they are time limited.

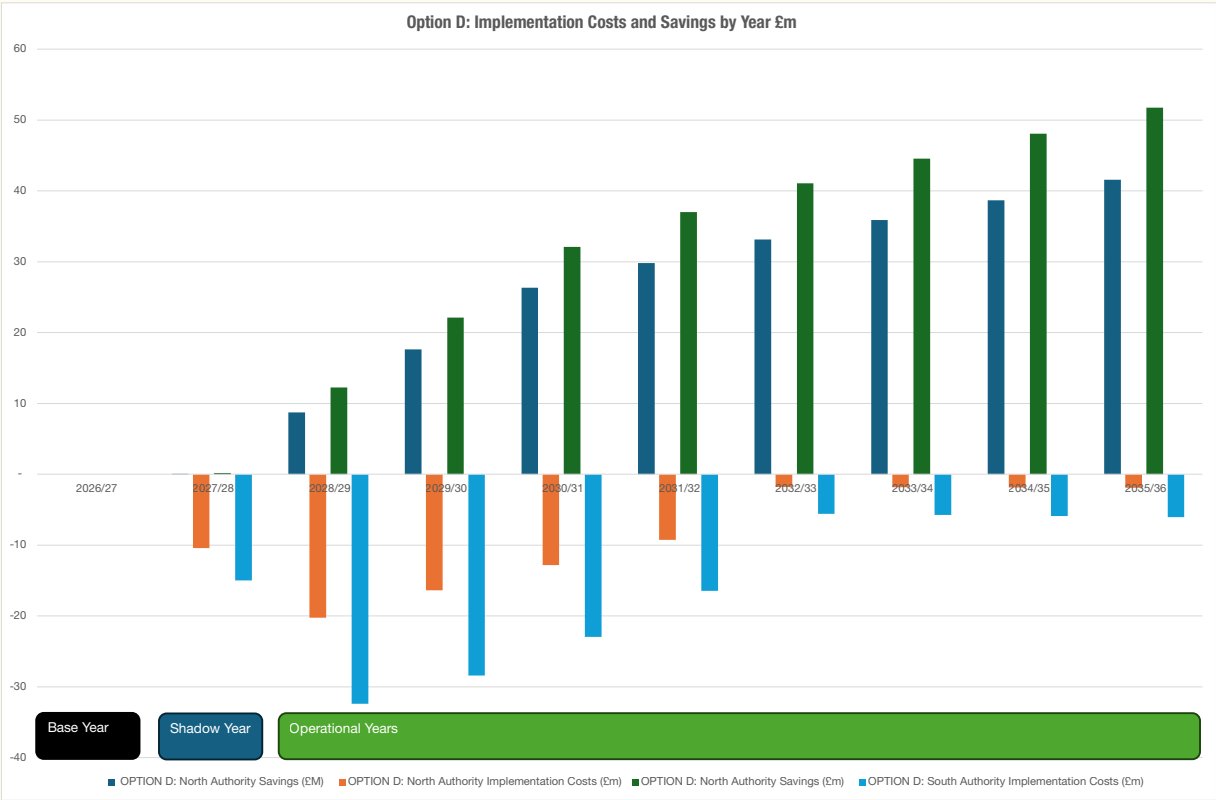


A breakdown of the £215m Implementation costs for Option D is shown below:

Implementation Cost Category	North Staffordshire Unitary Implementation Costs	Southern and Mid- Staffordshire Unitary Implementation Costs	TOTAL Implementation Costs
	£m	£m	£m
Duplication of a relatively small proportion of current County Council staffing roles, in particular for management below [tiers 1-3], specialist statutory roles/teams and business partnering support functions	11.38	40.16	51.55
Small degree in proportionate terms of unavoidable non-staffing costs due to loss of economies of scale and additional costs of re-procurement, either initially or when contracts expire and need to be renewed or recommissioned- includes one off costs which will cease, and some continuing	14.34	39.29	53.63
Shadow council - initial creation followed by increased costs of unitary council due to additional responsibilities	5.07	5.02	10.08
Election (weighted less cost than saving as presume few wards/ stations)	1.09	1.27	2.37
Implementation and programme delivery team (external support/ expertise)	10.84	13.93	24.78
Workforce planning costs	1.75	2.40	4.15
Agency / Interim staff to replace departees - greater in the South, due to presence of SOTCC existing unitary function in North	2.50	3.00	5.50
IT consolidation and change. System rationalisation planning - assume greater costs in South as more disparate systems from more districts/ boroughs, plus SOTCC unitary already has tier one functions - county is split equally	8.91	11.88	20.78
Winding up existing authorities (final accounts/ audits/ valuations/ legal/ novations)	1.08	1.92	3.00
Branding and communications	3.50	3.50	7.00
Contingency	16.00	16.00	32.00
TOTAL	76.47	138.37	214.84



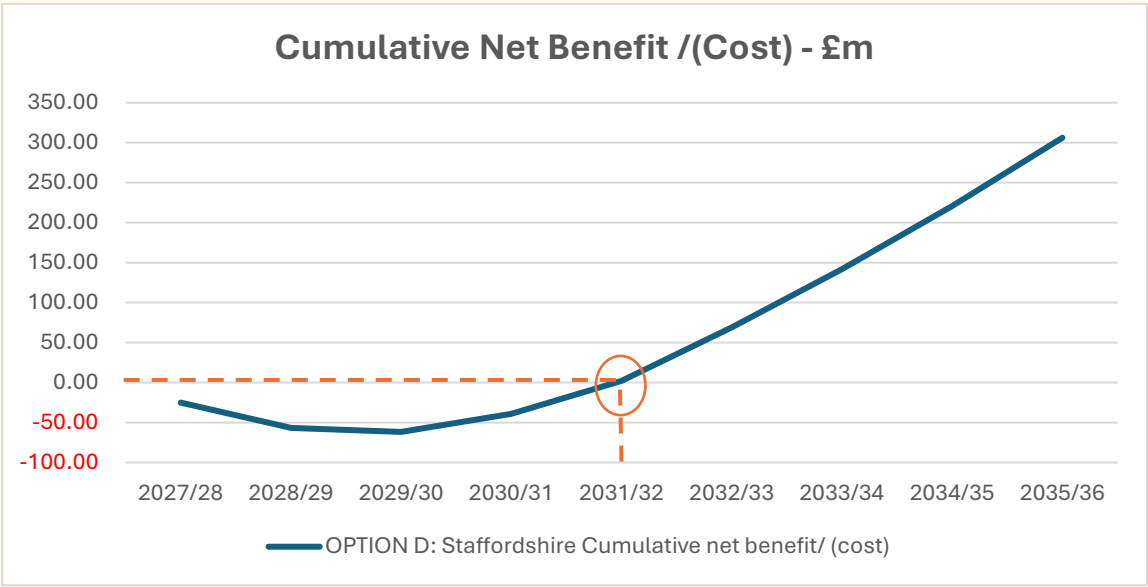
The graph below shows how the implementation costs are primarily incurred in the earlier years and how the annual savings grow throughout the assessment period for Option D.



Payback Period and Forward Assessment

The payback period marks the point where the cumulative benefits meet the accumulated implementation costs, beyond this for each assessed option an operational position demonstrates that there will be annual net savings resulting from the reorganisation. The chart below marks the point in 2031/32 that this will be achieved for Option D at 3.9 years from inception in 2028/29. Beyond this point, there are annualised net financial benefits equivalent to approximately £35m annually for

the North Staffordshire Unitary and £41m for the Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Unitary (£76m for Staffordshire in total). This position shows the strength of the financial position of each unitary in this option and the on-going resilience that will be necessary to maximise the benefits of the configuration for the residents of Staffordshire and mitigate against risks.



Other considerations

Budget gaps of existing councils

A consideration for financial analysis is that it assumes that current Councils (including the County) will manage any ongoing gross budget gaps, regardless of Local Government Reorganisation. The total gross budget gap for all Councils by 2028/29 is £40.9m (including the County Council of £24.2m) which has not been included within the breakeven analysis. However, should there be budget gaps post vesting day, the recurring savings projected can contribute to such gaps across the new authority.

Reserves and funding Staffordshire’s Local Government Reorganisation

The analysis shows that there was some £99.58m of usable reserves available at the end of the 2023/24 financial year. The amount available for investment in the implementation of local government reorganisation could be potentially increased by any unused Earmarked Reserves held at 31st March 2028 and use of capital receipts with Government approved flexibility.

Determination would need to be made how to allocate these reserves to the new unitaries post-reorganisation. Based on the analysis and the total level of reserves, it is considered that there are sufficient reserves in Staffordshire to manage the costs of transition to the new arrangements.

financial shocks whilst remaining viable, financially stable and sufficiently financially robust to mitigate against financial pressures in the future.

The table below sets out key financial risks and strategic mitigations, some of which include additional Government support:

Financial risks

The new Unitary Councils must be of sufficient size and balance to take advantage of opportunities to deliver at least expected efficiencies, improve capacity and capability as well as withstand

Financial Risk	Mitigation
Deliverability and Timing of Modelled Savings Largescale transformation projects may slip or deliver lower savings than modelled.	Councils to manage financial pressures proactively through locally controlled measures such as prudent Council tax setting, disciplined reserve stewardship, prioritised investment decisions, forward-looking financial planning, and allocating resources to support LGR. Capacity-building support and flexibility in delivery timelines, alongside contingency funding to manage slippage.
Council Tax Harmonisation Options implemented are lower than modelled, reducing revenue and increasing budget gaps.	Councils to manage financial pressures proactively through locally controlled measures such as prudent Council tax setting, disciplined reserve stewardship, prioritised investment decisions, forward-looking financial planning, and allocating resources to support LGR.
Implementation Costs A significant proportion of the transition investment will be early in the process, including a significant amount to mobilise the new unitary councils. There is a shortfall in the level of reserves that can be invested in upfront implementation costs	The existing Councils will need to recognise the requirement to secure the financial sustainability of the new authorities from day one and the ability of current authorities to maintain services is not jeopardised by the one-off transition costs. These considerations will need to be incorporated into medium term financial planning processes with immediate effect Government support requested: There is the potential that the existing local authorities will need to seek a capitalisation direction to enable the flexibility to use capital receipts to fund the transition to the single tier
HRA Budget Pressures Additional financial pressure on HRAs from changes to regulation challenging the ability to meet specified standard, customer demands and service debt.	Councils to actively manage pressures through locally controlled measures, but the main source of income generation (rents) is defined by national policy. The Self-Financing Settlement in 2012 predated the regulatory changes. Government support requested: A national review of HRA debt and the impact on HRAs would benefit the sector.

Financial Risk	Mitigation
MTFP Variances Current MTFPs contain pressures and risks that could require further use of reserves to manage, lowering the availability of reserves to fund changes and give resilience to the new entities. Pressures in adult social care, children's services, and homelessness are high and continuing. Councils implement actions or make decisions before vesting day that affect the future financial position of the new entities, for example implementing Council Tax rises below the maximum allowed or deploying their reserves.	Councils to manage financial pressures proactively through locally controlled measures such as prudent Council tax setting, disciplined reserve stewardship, prioritised investment decisions, forward-looking financial planning, and allocating resources to support LGR. Agreement of guiding principles prior to a Structural Changes Order being issued. Government support requested: Additional flexibility and targeted funding support for high-pressure service areas, particularly adult social care and homelessness.
Fair Funding Review 2.0 Given the status of FFP2.0, changes to the funding regime have not been factored into the current financial appraisal. A negative outcome for Staffordshire or reduction in current funding would undermine financial forecasts.	Timely and transparent exemplifications to support accurate financial planning, and transitional funding to mitigate uncertainty.
Waste Reforms Cost pressures in meeting regulatory reforms, with lack of clarity, certainty or long-term guarantees or visibility of funding.	Government support requested: Clear guidance and full funding support for mandated waste reforms to avoid unfunded cost burdens.
Outcome of the Review of the Dedicated Schools Grant The statutory override protects reserves from the impact of deficits; any changes could create unsustainable budget pressures for new Unitary Councils.	Government support requested: Assurance that the statutory override will remain in place or that alternative protections will be introduced to safeguard financial sustainability.



Financial Annexes

This section sets out the evidence base and approach that underpins the financial analysis presented in the proposal. It consolidates the supporting data, calculations, and assumptions used in constructing the financial model for the assessed local government reorganisation options, ensuring that the analysis is transparent and traceable.

The purpose is to provide the detailed information that supports the narrative and conclusions reached in the main body of the document. Each appendix documents its source data, allocation approaches, assumptions, and any material judgement applied in the assessment process.

It is structured with four technical annexes; each aligned with a core element of the financial analysis:

Annex A – Methodology and Assumption Log: Captures the overarching modelling approach, data sources, high-level assumptions, and any steps taken to validate inputs.
Annex B – Savings Assumptions: Sets out the savings estimates in full, including baseline costs, percentage reductions, and rationale by category.
Annex C – Implementation Cost Breakdown: Breaks down one-off transition costs by year and type and any contingency assumptions noted.
Annex D – Other Considerations: Consideration of other financial factors alongside the impact of transformation.

Each section aligned to the relevant sections of the main report. And provides the technical foundation from which the financial case is built. It provides for interrogation of the details of the financial modelling.

Annex A

Methodology and Assumption Log:

The financial models have been prepared in three sections:

1).	Assumptions;
2).	Calculations; and
3).	Outputs, including calculation of payback period, individual year impact of LGR and a cumulative impact of LGR.

The models are based on two key assumptions:

1).	Savings will be derived from the consolidation of authorities; and
2).	Implementation costs will be required to bring the closure of existing councils and create the new successor entities.

The models project the savings and costs across ten years; a pre-implementation ‘Base year’ in 2026/27, followed by a ‘Shadow year’ and eight post-implementation years. This is sufficient to demonstrate where a ‘Payback Year’¹ incorporating all implementation costs savings the latter of which will be on-going.

The models are based on 2025/26 prices and do not include adjustment for future inflation – this has been applied across all options consistently to enable like-for-like comparison.

¹ The point in time from commencement where cumulative savings meet the cumulative value of the costs

Council Tax Harmonisation

The models include the impact of Council Tax Harmonisation which is assumed to consolidate across the first three years of operation meaning that some areas of Staffordshire would see Council Tax rises above the referendum threshold.

2025-26 Band D Council Tax in Staffordshire ranges from £1,699.00 in Stoke-on-Trent to £1,873.01 in Cannock Chase. The financial appraisal lifted the upper rate in each of the new unitaries by up to 4.99% annually, being

the referendum limit. Then a harmonisation over three years lifted the lower tax levels in the other areas making up the new unitary to the higher level to maximise Council Tax income for the new authorities. This would represent the highest rising Council Tax in North Staffordshire being 7.51% increases in Stoke-on-Trent in each of 2028/29, 2029/30 and 2030/31 and for the same period in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire being 6.77% increases in South Staffordshire's Council Tax, which grows to harmonise with the highest rate

in Southern and Mid-Staffordshire being Cannock Chase. From Year 4 onwards the rise across the county is at 4.99% annually.

This represents an average increase over the eight operational years assessed of 5.27% (5.25% in the Northern Unitary and 5.28% in Southern Unitary). Details are shown in the following table.

2028/9 to 2035/6 % Council Tax Band D Increase (operational years)														
Year	Stafford-shire Moor-lands	Cannock Chase	East Stafford-shire (North)	East Stafford-shire (South)	Newcastle-under-Lyme	South Stafford-shire	Stafford (North)	Stafford (South)	Tamworth	Stoke-on-Trent	Lichfield	NORTH Average	SOUTHERN AND MID Average	STAFFORD-SHIRE Average
2028/9	5.51%	4.48%	4.97%	5.46%	4.53%	6.77%	5.65%	6.14%	5.59%	7.51%	5.79%	5.63%	5.70%	5.67%
2029/0	5.51%	4.99%	4.97%	5.46%	4.99%	6.77%	5.65%	6.14%	5.59%	7.51%	5.79%	5.73%	5.79%	5.76%
2030/1	5.51%	4.99%	4.97%	5.46%	4.99%	6.77%	5.65%	6.14%	5.59%	7.51%	5.79%	5.73%	5.79%	5.76%
2031/2	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%
2032/3	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%
2033/4	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%
2034/5	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%
2035/6	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%	4.99%
Ave. per year	5.19%	4.93%	4.98%	5.17%	4.93%	5.66%	5.24%	5.42%	5.21%	5.93%	5.29%	5.25%	5.28%	5.27%

A further assumption on Council Tax is that the tax base universally grows by 1% annually from 369,558 in 2025/26 to include a modest expectation of growth in the tax base.



Annex B

Savings Assumptions

Savings have been calculated based on savings of unitary authorities set out within previous local government reorganisation documentation. These included fourteen previous cases for change across England.

The reference cases calculated savings for a Base Case and Stretch Case, with the average of these reflecting a Mid Case. We have used the methodology used by these cases to calculate a Mid Case.

Savings approach

To estimate the potential savings, an overall spend against each of the saving categories was identified and a corresponding high-level saving against spend was made against each of the categories.

No savings from LGR have been assumed to be realised in the Base Year, and only modest amounts in the Shadow Year. The savings fully commence in Year 1 of operation (2028/29) and build up from then onwards. The savings have been phased based on expected realisation as per the below table:

Consolidated savings for Option D Combined

OPTION D: Combined Savings (£m)				Base	Shadow	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
				2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	
Reorganisation benefits	Savings assessed as achievable in the shorter-term	Consolidating leadership and senior management across the councils	Chief Executives	-	-	1.19	1.23	1.26	1.30	1.34	1.38	1.42	1.46	10.58
		Initial wider workforce savings due to consolidation - senior officers >£50k	Senior officers	-	0.24	2.00	2.57	2.65	2.73	2.81	2.89	2.98	3.07	21.93
		Initial wider workforce savings due to consolidation - other officers >£50k	Officer >£50k	-	0.02	0.12	0.28	0.33	0.39	0.44	0.45	0.47	0.48	2.99
		Initial non-staffing expenditure savings due to consolidation		-	-	-	1.15	2.30	3.45	4.60	4.60	4.60	4.60	25.31
		Savings from reducing the number of councillors		-	-	4.68	4.68	4.68	4.68	4.68	4.68	4.68	4.68	37.46
		Savings from reducing the number of local elections		-	-	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	5.92



OPTION D: Combined Savings (£m)				Base	Shadow	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
				2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	
Transformation benefits	Savings that will take longer to realise, as they are more reliant on changes to be delivered after the new unitary authorities are established	Wider workforce expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone - officers >£50k	Officer >£50k	-	-	-	0.09	0.30	0.46	0.63	0.65	0.67	0.69	3.47
		Wider workforce expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone - officers <£50k		-	-	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.40	0.60	0.80	0.80	0.80	3.88
		Reduction in non-staffing expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone		-	-	-	0.06	0.35	0.86	1.61	2.07	2.30	2.30	9.55
		Reduction in property revenue costs through consolidating existing local authority operational estate		-	-	-	-	1.60	3.20	3.20	3.20	3.20	3.20	17.60
		A modest increase proposed for sales, fees and charges income.		-	-	2.86	8.58	11.44	11.44	11.44	11.44	11.44	11.44	80.07
		Council Tax Harmonisation		-	-	9.28	20.24	32.64	37.18	42.13	47.54	53.43	59.86	302.31
				-	0.26	21.02	39.78	58.45	66.83	74.22	80.45	86.73	93.33	521.07
Total benefit				-	0.26	21.02	39.78	58.45	66.83	74.22	80.45	86.73	93.33	521.07



Implementation Costs

Implementation costs have been prepared from a top-down approach and are based on the implementation costs outlined within previous case for change documentation. These include the same cases for change used to inform the savings assumptions, to ensure consistency. Again, these are based on a Mid Case.

that are considered to take longer to implement lasting to the final year of the assessment in Year eight. These have then been phased as per the below table:

that are considered to take longer to implement lasting to the final year of the assessment in Year eight. These have then been phased as per the below table:

For each of the previous LGR cases, an average implementation cost was calculated for a Base Case and Stretch Case, with the average of the two informing a Mid Case. This assessment uses the principles and uses the Mid Case position to quantify the implementation costs, which is consistent with the calculation of the savings.

Implementation costs have been assumed to start from the Base Year, continue and build in the Shadow Year and build up in the subsequent years with the largest elements being incurred up to Year four but an on-going need from some aspects

Consolidated implementation costs for Option D Combined

OPTION D: Combined Implementation Costs (£m)			Base	Shadow	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
			2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	
Disaggregation costs	Cost of disaggregating County Council functions across two unitary authorities	Duplication of a relatively small proportion of current County Council staffing roles, in particular for management below [tiers 1-3], specialist statutory roles/ teams and business partnering support functions.	-	0.57	4.69	6.04	6.22	6.41	6.60	6.80	7.00	7.21	51.55
		Small degree in proportionate terms of unavoidable non-staffing costs due to loss of economies of scale and additional costs of re-procurement, either initially or when contracts expire and need to be renewed or recommissioned- includes one off costs which will cease, and some continuing	-	8.13	13.00	14.63	11.38	6.50	-	-	-	-	53.63



OPTION D: Combined Implementation Costs (£m)			Base	Shadow	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	TOTAL
			2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32	2032/33	2033/34	2034/35	2035/36	
Implementation costs	Enable the effective creation of the new unitary arrangements and deliver changes required to achieve the transformation benefits once the new authorities have been set up	Shadow council - initial creation followed by increased costs of unitary council due to additional responsibilities	-	4.15	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	0.74	10.08
		Election (weighted less cost than saving as presume few wards/ stations)	-	2.37	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.37
		Implementation and programme delivery team (external support/ expertise)	-	3.80	7.60	6.08	4.86	2.43	-	-	-	-	24.78
		Workforce planning costs	-	-	1.65	1.25	1.25	-	-	-	-	-	4.15
		Agency / Interim staff to replace departees - greater in the South, due to presence of SOTCC existing unitary function in North	-	-	2.20	1.65	1.10	0.55	-	-	-	-	5.50
		IT consolidation and change. System rationalisation planning - assume greater costs in South as more disparate systems from more districts/ boroughs, plus SOTCC unitary already has tier one functions - county is split equally	-	4.38	8.75	4.38	2.19	1.09	-	-	-	-	20.78
		Winding up existing authorities (final accounts/ audits/ valuations/ legal/ novations)	-	-	3.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.00
		Branding and communications	-	2.00	3.00	2.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.00
		Contingency	-	-	8.00	8.00	8.00	8.00	-	-	-	-	32.00
Total			-	25.39	52.64	44.76	35.74	25.73	7.34	7.54	7.74	7.95	214.84



Annex D - Other Considerations

Impact of Fair Funding 2.0 on Gross Budget Gap

The financial analysis assumes that all existing councils (including the County) will manage their ongoing gross budget gaps regardless of local government reorganisation. The total gross budget gap for all councils by 2028/29 of £40.9m (including the County Council of £24.2m) has not been included within the financial assessment. However, whilst it is considered that Fair Funding 2.0 will have an impact on councils' financial positions, the details are not yet formed sufficiently to include in the analysis.

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 from DSG.

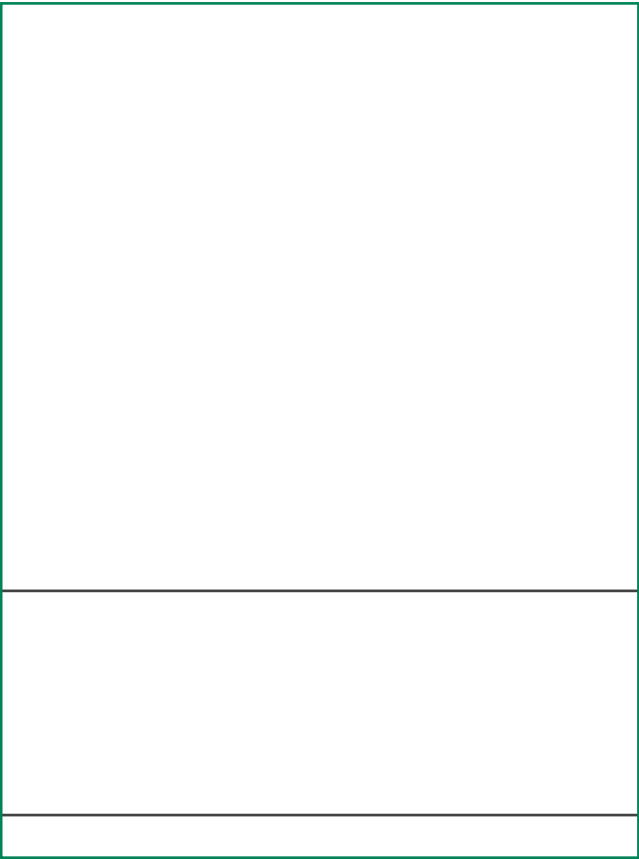
Exceptional Financial Support

Stoke-on-Trent City Council is in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) to assist it in meeting its financial obligations. Given this support is considered short-term and temporary, and the City Council is understood to be meeting its obligations in relation to the support, then it is not considered necessary to include in the analysis.

Housing Revenue Accounts

HRAs within Staffordshire represents a significant opportunity for the proposed Unitary Councils, with just three of the Councils having HRA account. While these accounts are ringfenced and, therefore, unaffected by LGR it is important to contextualise the impact that reorganisation and impending regulatory changes will have on their delivery capabilities. The consolidation of these HRAs under a larger Unitary structure presents a unique chance to unlock substantial financial savings through economies of scale, optimise resource allocation, and enhance the capacity across the county to build new social housing stock significantly.

Compliance with evolving housing regulations will undoubtedly remain a challenge for the new Councils but their scale will allow them to withstand financial shocks and allow for more efficient and effective management of our housing assets.



Appendix D

Cost-Benefit Analysis Of Local Government Reorganisation Across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent

1 Purpose

This appendix summarises the methodology, assumptions and results of the cost-benefit analysis (CBA) undertaken to inform Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Proposal for the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) across Staffordshire.

This analysis builds on the work undertaken within the financial modelling, the results of which have been combined with an assessment of the wider economic benefits of the preferred LGR option (i.e., Option D). Further details on the scope of this option, as well as other options considered as part of this LGR proposal, can be found in the main report.

2 Assessment of costs and monetisable benefits

2.1 Key assumptions

The CBA compares the costs and benefits that are expected to arise under the preferred LGR option. The methodology used for the CBA was developed in line with HM Treasury Green Book guidance, while also adopting key learnings from other LGR proposals across England.

The appraisal period covers 10 years from 2026/27 to 2035/26 – in alignment with Green Book guidance which specifies that “*costs and benefits should be calculated over the lifetime of the proposal*” and recommends a standard appraisal period of 10 years for proposals involving administrative changes.

All estimates of costs and benefits are in real 2025/26 prices, with the effects of inflation removed using the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR's) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflator index where required. The social discount rate of 3.5% has been applied to all cost and benefit estimates, as per Green Book guidance. Detailed assumptions can be found later in this appendix.

2.2 Costs

The relevant costs for the preferred LGR option have been identified and estimated through the financial modelling work undertaken in support of this proposal. These costs comprise:

- **Implementation costs:** To form the new entities creating the platform to deliver high-quality public services efficiently will require a series of one-off or time-restricted costs such as technology platform integration, staff redundancy, programme and project management, professional development, and professional fees.
- **Disaggregation costs:** Changing from two upper tier authorities with eight districts and boroughs to options of two larger unitary authorities will incur costs of disaggregation from the division of county-level services, including costs of new leadership and management structures.

The modelling approach followed previous LGR models, methodologies and assumptions, working on a 'midpoint' position to give the most likely scenario across the period. Further details on the methodology and key assumptions used to estimate these costs can be found in the finance appendices provided as part of this submission.

Table 1 below summarises the economic costs of the preferred LGR option, indicating a **total 10-year cost of c.£169m in discounted terms** – comprised of **c.£89m in implementation costs** and **c.£80m in disaggregation costs**. It should be noted that the economic costs presented below differ from the financial costs set out elsewhere in this proposal submission, due to adjustments for inflation and discounting in this analysis (as explained in the previous section of this document).

Table 1: Economic costs of the preferred LGR option (£m, 2025/26 price, 2026/27-2035/36)

	Undiscounted (£m)	Discounted (£m)
Implementation costs		
Shadow council – initial creation followed by increased costs of unitary council due to additional responsibilities	9.2	7.9
Election (weighted less cost than saving as presume few wards / stations)	2.3	2.1
Implementation and programme delivery team (external support/ expertise)	23.1	20.3
Workforce planning costs	3.9	3.4
Agency / Interim staff to replace departees – greater in the South, due to presence of SOTCC existing unitary function in North	5.1	4.5
IT consolidation and change. System rationalisation planning – assume greater costs in South as more disparate systems from more districts/ boroughs, plus SOTCC unitary already has tier one functions – county is split equally	19.5	17.4
Winding up existing authorities (final accounts / audits / valuations / legal / novations)	2.8	2.6
Branding and communications	6.6	6.0
Contingency	29.4	25.2
Total implementation costs	102.0	89.4
Disaggregation costs		
Duplication of a relatively small proportion of current County Council staffing roles, in particular for management below [tiers 1-3], specialist statutory roles/teams and business partnering support functions.	45.4	36.3
Small degree in proportionate terms of unavoidable non-staffing costs due to loss of economies of scale and additional costs of re-procurement, either initially or when contracts expire and need to be renewed or recommissioned – includes one-off costs which will cease, and some continuing	49.9	43.7
Total disaggregation costs	95.3	80.0
Total costs	197.2	169.4

2.3 Benefits

The potential benefits that could arise from LGR in Staffordshire are considerable. Benefits have been identified through a combination of internal stakeholder meetings and a desktop review of other LGR proposals and case studies, and have been grouped in line with the Green Book's three benefit categories:

- **Direct benefits:** These are the primary, intended outcomes that accrue directly to the originating organisations (i.e., the local authorities in Staffordshire). They are often the easiest to quantify and value in financial terms.
- **Indirect benefits:** These are secondary or unintended positive consequences that arise as a result of the direct benefits. They often require additional changes or projects to be fully implemented and can be more difficult to quantify.
- **Wider benefits:** These benefits extend beyond the immediate sphere of the project or organisation, and accrue to society as a whole, including households, businesses and the broader economy.

Nine main benefits were identified through this process, as set out in Table 2 below. Adopting a proportionate approach, this CBA has not attempted to monetise all nine benefits. Rather, the appraisal focuses on two of the nine benefits (i.e., the two benefits which could be monetised most reliably), with the remaining benefits considered qualitatively elsewhere in the CBA.

Table 2: Direct cost savings from the preferred LGR option (£m, 2025/26 price, 2026/27-2035/36)

ID	Benefit description	Benefit category	Benefit class
BEN01	Financial savings	Direct	Monetisable (cash-releasing)
BEN02	Simplification of governance and clearer accountability	Direct	Qualitative
BEN03	Improved service integration and quality	Direct	Qualitative
BEN04	Improved long-term strategic planning	Indirect	Qualitative
BEN05	Improved workforce planning and culture building	Indirect	Qualitative
BEN06	Economic growth and employment opportunities	Wider	Monetisable (societal)
BEN07	Strengthening of local identity and community voice	Wider	Qualitative
BEN08	Fairness, consistency and equity for residents	Wider	Qualitative
BEN09	Foundation for devolution and future growth	Wider	Qualitative

The text below summarises the approaches adopted for benefit monetisation.

2.3.1 Monetisable benefits

2.3.1.1 BEN01: Financial savings

A major driver of LGR is the opportunity to deliver significant and sustainable financial savings. Evidence from comparable reorganisations (e.g., Dorset, Buckinghamshire, North Yorkshire)

demonstrates that streamlining local government structures can generate substantial annual savings through economies of scale and reduced duplication.

Consolidating existing authorities in Staffordshire into two unitary councils will yield annual savings to the authorities, through workforce reductions at the leadership and senior management level, systems rationalisation, contract management and operating model changes.

The expected savings were estimated in the financial model using top-down modelling and local data inputs. These savings were estimated in nominal prices, so were converted to 2025/26 prices by applying the OBR's GDP deflator index where required. Further details on the methodology and key assumptions used to estimate these costs savings can be found in the finance appendices provided as part of this submission.

Table 3 below summarises the expected savings from the preferred LGR option, indicating a **total 10-year cost saving of c.£355m in discounted terms**. This is comprised of **c.£73m in reorganisation cost savings** (assessed as being achievable in the shorter term) and **c.£282m in transformation cost savings** (which will take longer to realise, as they are more reliant on changes to be delivered after the new unitary councils are established).

Table 3: Financial savings from the preferred LGR option (£m, 2025/26 price, 2026/27-2035/36)

	Undiscounted (£m)	Discounted (£m)
Reorganisation cost savings		
Consolidating leadership and senior management across the councils	9.3	7.5
Initial wider workforce savings due to consolidation - senior officers >£50k	19.3	15.5
Initial wider workforce savings due to consolidation - other officers >£50k	2.6	2.0
Initial non-staffing expenditure savings due to consolidation	21.9	16.9
Savings from reducing the number of councillors	33.1	26.6
Savings from reducing the number of local elections	5.2	4.2
Total reorganisation cost savings	91.5	72.7
Transformation cost savings		
Wider workforce expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone - officers >£50k	3.0	2.3
Wider workforce expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone - officers <£50k	3.3	2.6
Reduction in non-staffing expenditure savings beyond the lower level of initial savings achieved through reorganisation alone	8.2	6.2
Reduction in property revenue costs through consolidating existing local authority operational estate	15.2	11.7
A modest increase proposed for sales, fees and charges income.	70.1	55.5
Council Tax Harmonisation	262.3	204.1
Total transformation cost savings	362.1	282.4
Total financial savings	453.6	355.1

2.3.1.2 BEN06: Economic growth and employment opportunities

By creating two unitary councils that cover larger areas and populations, the new councils will have greater capacity to drive economic and employment growth through more coordinated planning and service delivery, stronger local leadership and targeted investment. Key benefits include:

- Unified economic development and inward investment strategies, giving the area a stronger, clearer voice in promoting growth.
- Enhanced ability to attract funding from government and private sector partners by presenting larger, cohesive economic areas with clear priorities.
- Streamlined planning and development processes, reducing barriers to business growth and accelerating delivery of local housing and regeneration schemes.
- Alignment of skills and employment programmes with local business needs, enabling more residents to access good jobs and career opportunities.
- Support for innovation and clean growth sectors, including advanced manufacturing, logistics, digital industries, and clean energy along the A50/A500 corridor.

The new authorities will be empowered to shape local labour markets, foster entrepreneurship and invest strategically in regeneration and infrastructure, driving sustained job creation across the region.

For the purposes of this CBA, this benefit has been calculated as follows:

1. The baseline position for the local labour market was first established using Office for National Statistics (ONS) datasets – showing a total unemployment count of 16,300 across Staffordshire in 2024/25.¹
2. In the absence of observable data on the potential scale of economic and employment growth from LGR, it has been assumed that successful reorganisation in Staffordshire could enable a modest reduction of 1% in unemployment levels across the county – equating to c.160 new jobs being created (or existing vacancies being filled). The likely mechanisms for this would include: more coordinated planning and service delivery, better targeted investment in local skills and employment programmes, and a range of other initiatives designed to promote growth and employment opportunities across the region.
3. Average worker productivity was estimated at the county level based on the gross value added (GVA) per filled job – a measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area divided by the number of employees. GVA per filled job in Staffordshire was £47,852 in 2019.² For the CBA, this estimate has been uprated to 2025/26 prices (i.e., £62,125) using the Office for Budget Responsibility's (OBR's) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deflator index.
4. The gross estimate of additional GVA created through reorganisation in Staffordshire was calculated by multiplying the incremental number of filled jobs from Step 2 (i.e., 160) by the GVA per job from Step 3 (i.e., £62,125).
5. The resulting net estimate of the additional GVA impact by adjusting the gross estimate to account for the following additionality factors:

¹ [Office for National Statistics: Labour Market Profile - Staffordshire \(2025\)](#)

² [Staffordshire Moorlands: Economy & Business Base \(2022\)](#)

- Deadweight – benefits that would still be accrued in the absence of the project (e.g., general ‘status quo’ growth in employment).
- Leakage – benefits going to people outside the target area (e.g., when local jobs are filled by non-Staffordshire residents)
- Displacement – benefits lost because individuals swap from another activity which would also have provided similar benefits (e.g. when a job created is taken by someone already in full time employment and their previous role is not re-filled)
- Substitution – benefits lost because companies change their decisions because of the scheme (e.g. if a grant was introduced to encourage local employers to recruit long-term unemployed people, some employers may replace existing employees with new workers in order to secure the grant).
- Economic multiplier effects – wider economic impact associated with additional local income and local supplier purchases (e.g., a boost in consumer spending within the local economy as a result of newly created / filled jobs).

Additionality assumptions for these factors were developed using the Homes & Communities Agency’s (HCA’s) Additionality Guide³ as a starting point, supplemented with local knowledge.

6. Finally, it was assumed that full realisation of this benefit would take circa 5 years to materialise, with a linear ramp-up (from 0% to 100%) over those five years.

Table 4 below summarises the estimated GVA increase from employment growth under the preferred LGR option, indicating a **total 10-year economic impact of c.£53m in discounted terms**.

Table 4: GVA increase from employment growth under the preferred LGR option (£m, 2025/26 price, 2026/27-2035/36)

	Undiscounted (£m)	Discounted (£m)
GVA increase from employment growth	66.0	52.6

2.3.2 Economic results

The quantitative results of the CBA are shown in Table 5 below. The table illustrates that the preferred option generates a strong **Net Present Social Value (£238m)** and **Benefit-Cost Ratio (2.4)**, even when just two of the nine identified benefits have been monetised and included in the calculation. Put simply, in present value terms, **every £1 invested in LGR across Staffordshire is expected to generate a minimum social return of £2.40 across the county**.

³ [Homes & Community Agency: Additionality Guide - Fourth Edition \(2014\)](#)

Table 5: Summary of economic assessment results (2025/26 price, 2026/27-2035/36)

	Discounted
Costs (C)	
Implementation costs	£89.4m
Aggregation costs	£80.0m
Total costs	£169.4m
Monetised benefits (B)	
Financial savings	£355.1m
Economic and employment growth	£52.6m
Total monetised benefits	£407.7m
Net Present Social Value (B – C)	£238.3m
Benefit Cost Ratio (B / C)	2.4

The qualitative benefits presented in the section below, which have not been monetised in this analysis due to data limitations, provide a fuller picture of the Value for Money potential of the preferred LGR option.

2.3.3 Qualitative benefits

2.3.3.1 BEN02: Simplification of governance and clearer accountability

Under the current two-tier model, responsibilities for local services are split between county and district councils, leading to duplication, complexity, and confusion for residents and businesses. The establishment of two unitary authorities would:

- **Create a single point of accountability** for all local government services in each area, ensuring residents and partners know exactly who is responsible for decisions and service delivery.
- **Simplify governance and reduce bureaucracy**, enabling faster, more coherent decision-making and improved public understanding.
- **Enhance democratic visibility** by ensuring each unitary council has a direct and transparent relationship with its communities, businesses, and partners.

By removing overlap between tiers, the two new unitary authorities will be empowered to act decisively, plan strategically, and be directly accountable for performance and outcomes.

2.3.3.2 BEN03: Improved service integration and quality

Reorganisation provides a unique opportunity to redesign services around people and places rather than around existing institutional boundaries. Currently, fragmented responsibilities hinder coordination, particularly in areas such as housing, health, and social care.

The establishment of two unitary authorities would allow for:

- Fully integrated service delivery across housing, social care, public health, environmental services and planning.
- Streamlined service pathways, ensuring residents experience joined-up support, particularly for vulnerable groups who depend on multiple services.
- Enhanced digital transformation, through unified technology infrastructure and data sharing, enabling smarter, evidence-based service delivery.
- Consistent standards of service across Staffordshire, reducing the “postcode lottery” effect caused by differing district policies and resource levels.

The reorganisation will improve both efficiency and the quality of outcomes, especially in critical areas such as health and social care integration, housing adaptations and community wellbeing.

2.3.3.3 BEN04: Improved long-term strategic planning

The creation of two, strategically capable unitary authorities will strengthen Staffordshire’s ability to plan and deliver long-term priorities. Each authority will have the scale and resources to:

- Develop and deliver comprehensive place-based strategies that align housing, transport, skills and economic growth.
- Engage more effectively with regional and national partners, including the West Midlands Combined Authority and government departments and agencies.
- Plan major infrastructure and investment projects that cross current district boundaries, supporting housing delivery and sustainable transport.
- Respond effectively to emerging challenges, such as population growth, climate change, and technological transformation.

By establishing two unitary authorities for Staffordshire, strategic alignment across the whole sub-region will be enhanced, unlocking devolved powers and investment through a future devolution deal.

2.3.3.4 BEN05: Improved workforce planning and culture building

Creating two unitary authorities offers opportunities for improved workforce planning and organisational culture. Benefits include:

- Greater career development opportunities within larger, professionally diverse organisations, supporting recruitment and retention.

- Consistent employment terms and professional standards across the area, improving workforce stability and morale.
- Investment in leadership, innovation, and digital skills, enabling a modern, agile public service workforce.
- Improved collaboration across service areas through shared goals and unified corporate cultures.

These factors will support more efficient service delivery and create an organisation capable of continuous improvement and innovation.

2.3.3.5 BEN07: Strengthening of local identity and community voice

While the move to unitary status creates larger administrative entities, the two-authority model has been chosen specifically to preserve and strengthen local identity. Each unitary authority will have:

- Distinct geographic and economic characteristics, enabling tailored local priorities and investment approaches.
- Devolved locality structures, such as area boards or community partnerships, ensuring decision-making remains close to residents.
- Enhanced partnership working with town and parish councils, voluntary organisations, and local communities to co-design and deliver services.

This approach combines the efficiency of scale with the accountability and responsiveness of local governance, maintaining the character and pride of Staffordshire's communities.

2.3.3.6 BEN08: Fairness, consistency and equity for residents

Reorganisation allows for the harmonisation of policies, charges, and service standards across Staffordshire. Residents will benefit from:

- Greater consistency in service access and quality, regardless of where they live.
- Equitable distribution of resources and investment, ensuring all areas of Staffordshire share in growth and opportunity.
- Simplified access to support and information, through single customer portals and contact points.

This will foster a sense of fairness and shared purpose across the county.

2.3.3.7 BEN09: Foundation for devolution and future growth

The proposed model aligns closely with the Government's devolution framework and positions Staffordshire for a future devolution deal. The reorganisation will:

- Provide a governance structure capable of accepting devolved powers and funding from Whitehall.

- Enable the establishment of a Mayoral Combined Authority for strategic functions, strengthening Staffordshire's regional influence.
- Ensure Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent can compete effectively with neighbouring areas (e.g., West Midlands, Greater Manchester) for investment and innovation funding.

This forward-looking structure will future-proof local governance and enable sustained growth and prosperity.

Appendix E

Engagement with Stakeholders and Residents Supporting Evidence

Outcomes from Staffordshire Moorlands Residents' Survey

Stone and Uttoxeter LGR Engagement Report

Letter of Support from Uttoxeter Town Council

Appendix E1

Staffordshire Moorlands Residents' Survey 2025

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Residents’ Survey 2025

Local Government Reorganisation Question Analysis

The Council conducted a Residents’ Survey over a four-week period ending on Sunday 12 October 2025. This included a number of questions relating to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

The main mechanism for capturing responses was an online consultation questionnaire, promoted through the councils’ website, media releases and social media channels. The questionnaire was also available in alternative formats such as paper copies. In total, the questionnaire received 833 responses from across the Staffordshire Moorlands.

The results for questions relating to LGR are as follows.

Question
What are the top two priorities you would like local government to focus on in the future? (Please select 2 options)

	*Percentage	Count
High-quality local services (e.g. waste collection, adult care, road maintenance)	56%	421
Local decision-making and accountability	39%	295
Keeping council tax as low as possible	30%	228
Protecting and promoting local identity and heritage	29%	215
Better transport links and infrastructure	20%	146
Growing the local economy and creating jobs	16%	116
Providing access to affordable housing	5%	41

* Percentage reflects the proportion of participants who chose each option compared to the # of participants who responded to this question.

Question	Which type of new council setup do you believe would best serve your area?

	Percentage	Count
Two councils - West Staffordshire and East Staffordshire (preferred by Staffordshire County Council - it previously suggested one Staffordshire council with Stoke-on-Trent as it is now)	3.74%	28
Two councils - North Staffordshire and South Staffordshire (preferred by Stoke-on-Trent City Council and southern districts)	4.28%	32
Two councils - North Staffordshire (including Stone, Uttoxeter and their surrounding villages) and South Staffordshire (preferred by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council)	49.20%	368
I’m not sure	13.37%	100
Other (please write below)	29.41%	220

Summary of “other” responses by theme

- Opposition to a new unitary Council including Stoke-on-Trent
- The need to retain rural identity and services
- A fear of decline in services
- A preference for local governance
- Concerns about Financial Mismanagement
- A desire for alternative partnerships (e.g. working with other rural councils)

Question

Is there anything else you think is important in deciding the new structure of local councils?

This question revealed the following themes.

1). Opposition to “merging” with Stoke-on-Trent

- Distrust of Stoke-on-Trent City Council’s financial management.
- Concerns about absorbing Stoke’s debt and poor services
- Fear of losing local identity and autonomy.
- Belief that Stoke would drain resources from the Moorlands.

Representative sentiments:

- “Do not want to merge with the poorly run Stoke on Trent.”
- “Stoke is bankrupt.”
- “We will be swallowed up and lose our identity.”

2). Preservation of local identity and rural character

- Pride in its rural nature, market towns, and community spirit.
- Concerns about being overshadowed by urban priorities.
- Desire to maintain local governance and decision-making.

Representative sentiments:

- “Staffordshire Moorlands is a rural area... identity should be protected.”
- “Keep our Moorlands identity.”

3). Demand for local accountability and representation

- Decisions made by people who live locally.
- Councillors who understand and represent their communities.
- Transparency in governance and planning.

Representative sentiments:

- “Local councils generally understand the needs of local people.”
- “We need a local referendum on the reorganisation.”

4). 4. Financial concerns and resource allocation

- Anxiety about council tax being used to bail out other areas.
- Loss of funding for local services.
- Lack of financial transparency.

Representative sentiments:

- “Our council tax will be used to prop up other areas.”
- “Budgets need to be protected for the Staffordshire Moorlands.”

5). Planning, housing, and environmental protection

- Overdevelopment, especially on green belt land.
- Poor planning decisions favoring developers.
- Environmental degradation.

Representative sentiments:

- “Leave green belt alone. Once it is gone there is no return.”
- “Protecting wildlife and rural communities.”

6). Skepticism toward the consultation process

- Process is predetermined and tokenistic.
- Voices are not genuinely being considered.

Representative sentiments:

- “This is a box-ticking exercise.”
- “You aren’t listening to what people want.”

7). Suggestions for alternative structures

- Aligning with other rural councils (e.g., High Peak, Derbyshire).
- Keeping Staffordshire Moorlands independent.
- Creating structures based on geography and community similarity.

Representative sentiments:

- “Has there been any consideration to joining up with Derbyshire or Cheshire?”
- “North and south makes more sense geographically.”

8). Calls for improved services and infrastructure

- Need for better transport, healthcare, youth services, and policing.
- Desire for more investment in local towns.

Representative sentiments:

- “More access to sport and leisure.”
- “Improve roads, don’t just patch them.”

Question

If you commute to work, where do you most often go?

	Percentage	Count
Stoke-on-Trent	13.65%	98
Leek	11.00%	79
South Cheshire	3.90%	28
Newcastle-under-Lyme	3.48%	25
Stafford	2.09%	15
Derby	1.53%	11
Uttoxeter & surrounding area	1.39%	10
Manchester	0.84%	6
Buxton & surrounding area	0.70%	5
Stone & surrounding area	0.70%	5
Cheadle	0.97%	7
Biddulph	0.56%	4
Ashbourne	0.42%	3
Burton-upon-Trent	0.42%	3
Lichfield	0.14%	1
Other	1.95%	14
I don’t commute to work	56.27%	404

Question

When you travel to use amenities (such as larger shops, leisure centres, cinemas, hospitals, or train stations), where do you most often go?

	Percentage	Count
Leek	28.53%	404
Stoke-on-Trent	25.92%	367
Newcastle-under-Lyme	10.10%	143
South Cheshire	6.99%	99
Derby	5.51%	78
Stafford	4.17%	59
Manchester	3.53%	50
Uttoxeter	3.46%	49
Buxton	2.40%	34
Ashbourne	1.69%	24
Cheadle	1.69%	24
Burton-upon-Trent	1.20%	17
Lichfield	1.20%	17
Biddulph	0.49%	7
Liverpool	0.28%	4
Stone	0.28%	4
Sheffield	0.28%	4
Blythe Bridge	0.28%	4
Chester	0.21%	3
Tamworth	0.21%	3

Demographics

Age Ranges

	Percentage	Count
Under 16	0.14%	1
16-17	0.14%	1
18-24	0.55%	4
25-34	4.55%	33
35-44	8.68%	63
45-54	13.36%	97
55-64	27.96%	203
65-74	27.82%	202
75+	10.47%	76
Prefer not to say	6.34%	46

Health conditions or illnesses that reduce your ability to carry out day to day activities

	Percentage	Count
Yes, a lot	5.52%	40
Yes, a little	23.48%	170
Not at all	58.01%	420
Prefer not to say	12.98%	94

Current housing situation

	Percentage	Count
Owner occupier	85.99%	626
Privately renting	3.43%	25
Renting from a housing association	3.02%	22
Other	2.47%	18
Prefer not to say	5.08%	37

Gender

	Percentage	Count
Male	43.92%	314
Female	51.05%	365
Prefer not to say	5.03%	36

Appendix E2

Stone and Uttoxeter LGR Engagement Report

Stone & Uttoxeter LGR Engagement Report

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Executive Summary

This engagement was facilitated by the community engagement team at Cratus Group, and gathered views from residents, businesses, and community groups in and around Stone and Uttoxeter on potential Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) arising from the Government's 2024 English Devolution White Paper. The programme combined an online public survey, hosted on a digital engagement platform between 2 September and 3 October 2025, alongside with high-footfall pop-up events, targeted stakeholder outreach, and continuous monitoring and reporting.

A total of 461 survey responses were received, including 84 completed in person at events which directly engaged more than 100 residents. Responses were drawn predominantly from ST14 and ST15 postcodes, demonstrating that feedback was locally grounded and representative of residents in and around the towns of Stone and Uttoxeter.

Communications sought to reach a broad cross-section of local organisations, businesses, schools, healthcare providers and community groups, ensuring that awareness of the consultation and its purpose was widespread.

The engagement sought to understand:

- How people identify with Stone and Uttoxeter and their sense of place.
- Residents' experiences of current local government and public services.
- Patterns of travel, work, and access to amenities across both towns.
- Priorities and preferences for any future local government arrangements.

Findings demonstrate a strong sense of local identity and pride in both towns. Residents consistently described Stone and Uttoxeter as friendly, community-minded market towns with good local amenities and a distinctive character. There was also a clear preference for retaining local control and accountability, with many expressing their preference their town to form part of a new, similarly sized, locally-focused council that would reflect the character of their community.

Key priorities identified through the survey included:

- Better transport links (35%)
- Greater local decision-making (33%)
- High-quality local services and protecting local identity (both 27%)
- Growing the local economy (22%)
- Keeping council tax low (19%)

Respondents placed a strong emphasis on practical improvements such as better roads, access to GPs, and more effective infrastructure planning to keep pace with housing growth.

Economic issues also featured prominently, with many residents calling for renewed investment in high streets, support for small and independent businesses, and action to manage town centre decline.

Views on reorganisation were mixed:

- Some residents saw potential benefits in simplifying council structures and reducing duplication of effort, provided that local voices are maintained and efficiency gains are clear.
- Others expressed concern about losing local accountability, higher costs, or decisions being taken further away from the communities they affect.
- Neutral and procedural comments highlighted the need for any future model to be properly tested, transparent, and locally informed before implementation.

Overall, the consultation showed a preference towards for a locally aligned “specific split” arrangement, either both towns would join with North Staffordshire, or one where Stone would remain within a Western or Southern area and Uttoxeter within an Eastern or Southern-mid Staffordshire grouping.

Due to the nature of the LGR process, we had to adapt during the consultation period to reflect the new East/West model which was introduced on the 9th of September as the preferred model by the county.

These options reflect strong support for maintaining existing community and geographic links while avoiding alignment with larger, more distant authorities. Although some respondents expressed uncertainty or supported alternative models.

Overall, residents expressed a shared desire for local government that is responsive, transparent, and centred on community priorities. While some recognise the potential advantages of reform, most believe that any future model must preserve local decision-making, ensure fair funding, and maintain the distinct identities of towns such as Stone and Uttoxeter.

Introduction

Background and Context

In response to the Government’s 2024 English Devolution White Paper, councils across Staffordshire have been invited to consider options for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). The Stone and Uttoxeter engagement programme was commissioned by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to understand how residents of the towns and surrounding areas of Stone & Uttoxeter view potential changes to local governance.

Stone and Uttoxeter sit within the wider Staffordshire structure but have distinct economic and community identities. The two towns share close links through commuting, education, and business networks, yet residents also express strong attachment to their own localities. The engagement sought to understand these relationships and how residents perceive the current and future structures of local government.

Objectives

The engagement aimed to:

- Understand local attitudes towards reorganisation and what matters most to residents.
- Explore the extent to which people identify with local government and district boundaries.
- Assess awareness of current patterns for accessing council services, travelling between districts for work and leisure.
- Provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to support future LGR discussions.

Methodology

Events

Public Engagement

To support the wider engagement programme and ensure the survey reached as broad and representative a subsection of the community as possible across the councils, we held a public engagement event in both Stone & Uttoxeter.

These pop-up sessions were located at high-footfall locations in both towns, chosen specifically to provide accessible opportunities for direct interaction with residents.

At each event, Cratus held face-to-face conversations, shared clear information about the potential options for change, answered questions, and encouraged residents to complete the survey.

The real value of these sessions was in the direct conversations we held with residents from various walks of life. We found that, on the whole, there was a good baseline knowledge that change was coming in local government, with well-informed opinions on a variety of topics within councils and their future structure.

It is clear that there is a degree of scepticism and even apathy towards change which many see as inevitable, but also an acceptance that it is happening regardless of that scepticism. Individuals were happy to have their views heard, but aired concerns that they didn't feel like their voice would influence the final decision.

Business Canvassing

In addition to the public pop-up events, a separate business engagement session was carried out in both towns, where our team visited a sample of independent businesses to discuss the options proposed for Local Government Reorganisation. This provided an opportunity to share information, answer questions, and hear directly from local business owners about their priorities and concerns.

The main issues raised during these conversations related to declining footfall and the changing nature of both Stone and Uttoxeter's high streets. Many businesses expressed frustration about the cost and management of business rates, which they felt placed small independent traders at a disadvantage. Others raised concerns about parking charges, planning regulations, and the slow pace of town centre investment and regeneration.

Some business owners called for councils to do more to encourage new and diverse enterprises, attract visitors, and make it easier for local start-ups to thrive. There was also a strong feeling that future local government structures should prioritise local economic growth, with decision-making kept close to the community to ensure that smaller towns receive fair support and investment.

Overall, businesses emphasised the importance of keeping diverse and well-managed town centres as central to maintaining the identity and economic resilience of both Stone and Uttoxeter.

Key outcomes:

- Direct engagement with over 100 residents in Stone & Uttoxeter.
- 79 surveys completed in person, contributing to the overall response.
- Distribution of information leaflets and signposting to the website for those wishing to respond online.

Survey

The survey was delivered through the **Give My View** online platform and open from **2 September to 3 October 2025**. It invited residents of Stone and Uttoxeter to respond to a series of closed and open questions on identity, priorities, and preferences for Local Government Reform.

Targeted promotion through social media, ensured participation across different demographics. In total, **461** surveys were completed.

Data Collection

Feedback was captured through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, with the former being the multiple-choice survey questions, and the latter produced from:

- Open-ended survey responses.
- Conversations at engagement events.

Data was securely stored and analysed, with fortnightly weekly snapshot reports provided throughout the engagement process and a comprehensive final report delivered in October 2025. All this data has been considered in the conclusions of this report.

Stakeholder Communications

The stakeholder engagement followed a targeted outreach and consultation strategy focused on Stone and Uttoxeter. Its aim was to raise awareness of proposed local government changes and encourage participation through the Give My View survey.

Personalised emails and letters were sent to explain the purpose of LGR, outline local implications, and invite feedback. The stakeholder lists covered a broad cross-section of each community, including local sports clubs, community and charitable organisations, major employers, healthcare providers, and schools.

This approach ensured that residents, businesses, and community groups across both towns were informed and had the opportunity to share their views on the proposed changes.

Survey Responses and Analysis

Demographics

The first few questions of the survey were designed to build up an idea of the demography of respondents, from their age, health conditions and where they live and work in relation to Stone and Uttoxeter.

Postcode analysis

Most responses came from ST14 and ST15, which cover Uttoxeter and Stone, confirming strong engagement from residents of both towns. Smaller numbers of responses came from DE6 (Ashbourne and surrounding villages), ST10–ST12 (neighbouring parts of Staffordshire), and a few outliers from WS and NG postcodes.

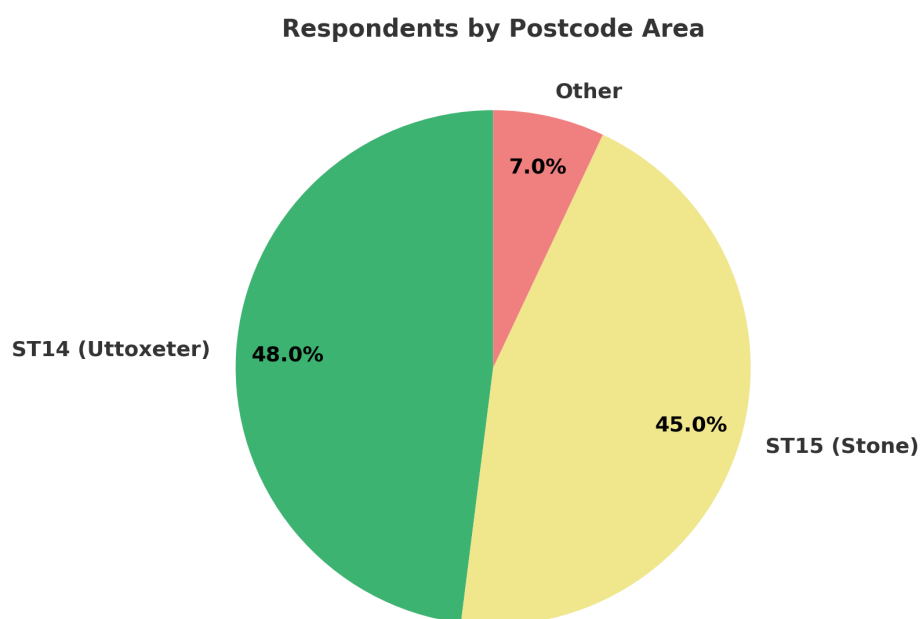


Figure 1

Living or working in the area.

Of all respondents, the majority (around 69%) either lived in or near Stone or Uttoxeter, while a further 24% indicated that they worked in one of the two towns but lived elsewhere.

Only a small proportion (around 7%) reported that they neither lived nor worked locally or selected 'other'.

Overall, the data shows a strong local connection to Stone and Uttoxeter, with particularly high representation from those living in or around Stone (38%) and Uttoxeter (31%). This demonstrates that the survey successfully engaged residents and businesses from both communities, providing a solid local perspective on the issues explored.

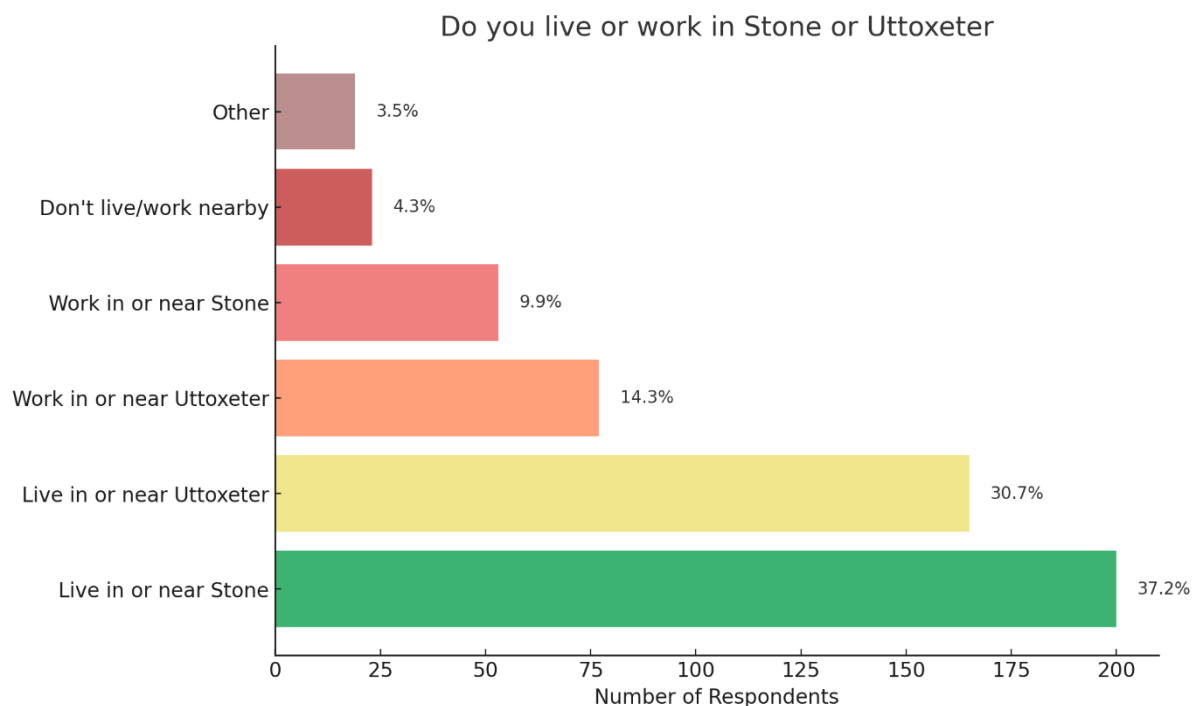


Figure 2

Age

As seen in Figure 3, The age profile of respondents is weighted toward older adults, with just over half (51%) aged between 55 and 74. A further 17% were aged 75 or over, while only a small number (15%) were aged under 45.

Across both Stone and Uttoxeter, the survey sample is notably older than the general population. Around two-thirds of respondents (68%) were aged 55 or over, compared with approximately 40% in Stone and 35–40% in Uttoxeter. Conversely, only around 15% of respondents were under 45, compared with around 36–40% locally.

This suggests the survey primarily reached a mature demographic, likely reflecting both the older population profile of the area and the channels used to promote the survey. While this provides valuable insight into the experiences of older residents who make up a significant

proportion of both towns, the results are less representative of younger adults and families, whose views may therefore be underrepresented.

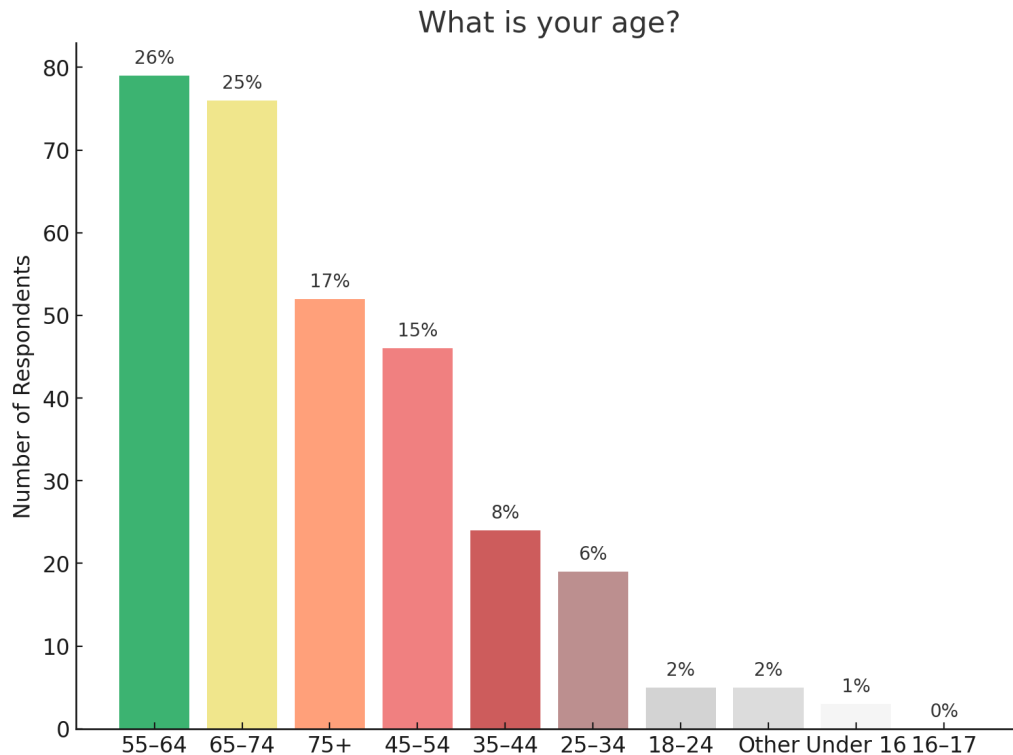


Figure 3

Health conditions in terms of health, just over half of respondents (52%) reported no long-term conditions affecting their daily activities, while around 40% experienced some impact—31% “a little” and 9% “a lot.” This is roughly double the rate suggested by Census 2021 data for both Stone and Uttoxeter, where around 18% of residents reported fair, bad, or very bad health.

The higher rate of reported health limitations in the survey is consistent with the older age profile of respondents, rather than necessarily indicating poorer overall health in the area. Consequently, while the data provides a strong picture of the health and wellbeing needs of older adults, it should not be interpreted as fully representative of the general population in either town.

Do you have any health conditions/illnesses which affect your daily activities?

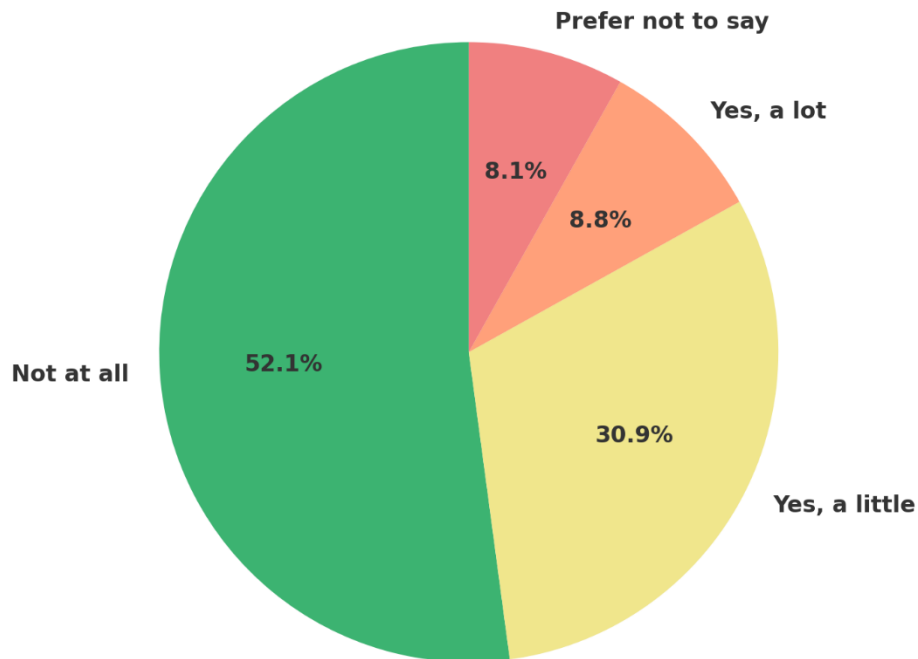


Figure 4

Sense of Place

Describing the area

Stone

Responses to this question were overwhelmingly positive, with most residents describing Stone and its surrounding villages as attractive, friendly, and community-focused places to live. The most common descriptors were "small market town," "canal town," and "semi-rural."

Many praised the historic character, green surroundings, and sense of local pride, highlighting the area's good amenities and strong community spirit. A recurring theme was the importance of the canal and market-town identity, often cited as what makes the area distinctive.

However, some expressed concern about overdevelopment, traffic congestion, and the loss of local character as housing growth continues. A smaller number felt the town had become

too large for its infrastructure or that the high street was in decline, though these were typically framed with affection for the area and concern for its future.

Residents who spoke with us at the pop-up event had largely lived in Stone for a long time, and seen it change over the years. Many understood that due to the geography of the town within Staffordshire, it could be grouped with a larger council in a new model, but there was a level of reluctance to join with Stoke-on-Trent.

Uttoxeter

Responses from residents in and around Uttoxeter highlight a strong sense of local pride and community, with many describing it as a traditional market town surrounded by countryside. The town is often characterised as friendly, compact, and well-connected, with easy access to larger centres such as Derby, Burton, and Stoke-on-Trent, yet retaining a distinct identity of its own.

Many respondents spoke positively about Uttoxeter's amenities, including its racecourse, local shops, and schools, as well as the balance between rural charm and modern convenience. The town was frequently portrayed as a pleasant, semi-rural place to live, appreciated for its walkability and community atmosphere.

However, some respondents voiced concerns about recent growth and development, noting that new housing and traffic congestion are changing the character of the area. A strong sentiment from our conversations was the significant decline in the high street in recent years, and the lack of facilities for young people.

Businesses in Uttoxeter were particularly pessimistic about the future of the high street in the town. Overall, Uttoxeter was described as a well-situated and friendly market town, valued for its rural setting and community feel, but one that is facing pressures from expansion and infrastructure strain as it continues to grow.

With regards to a new council model, many saw the benefits of joining with North Staffordshire, but many people had stronger ties with and felt more in common with the Eastern part of Staffordshire, even affinity with Derby rather than Stoke-on-Trent.

Travel Patterns

Commuting and travel for work

The survey explored how residents travelled/commuted for work. Figure 5 highlights that nearly half (46%) do not commute, while 24% travel to other destinations outside the listed towns. Stafford (10%) and Stoke-on-Trent (8%) are the most common specific commuting locations, with smaller proportions traveling to Derby, Burton-upon-Trent, Leek, and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Other responses included a mix of locations such as Stone, Uttoxeter, Eccleshall, Nottingham, Birmingham, Manchester, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwick, and Ashbourne, as well as several noting they were retired, self-employed, or working across multiple sites rather than commuting to a single place.

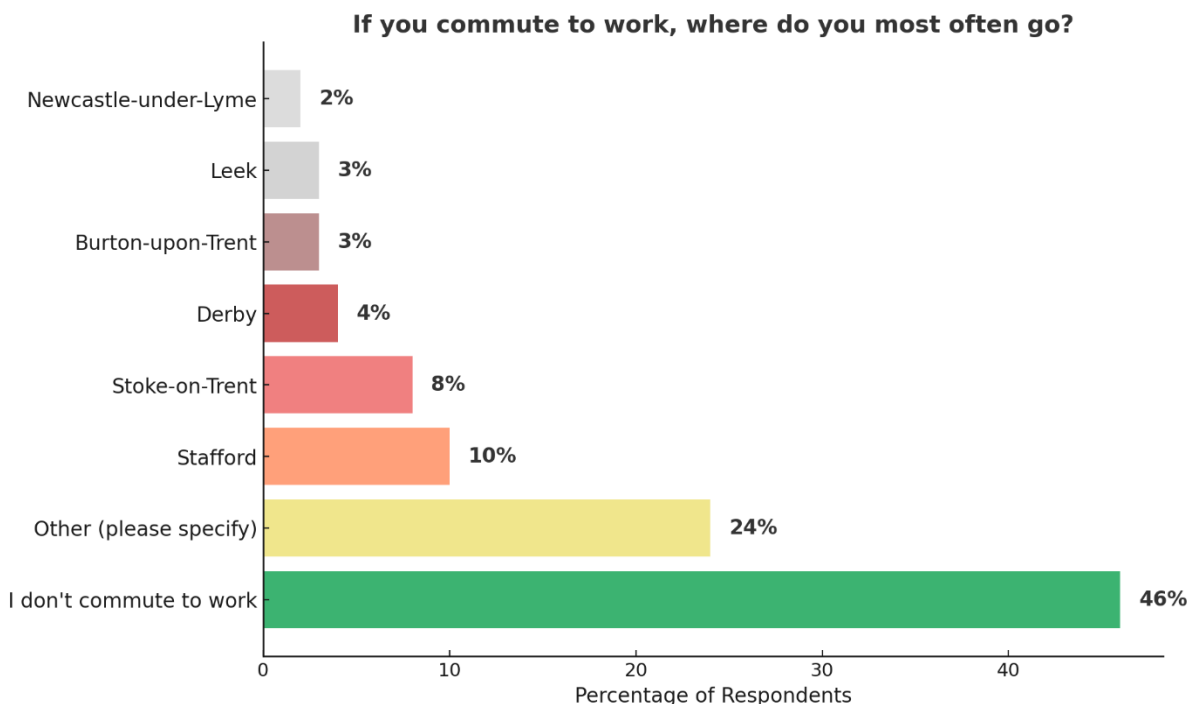


Figure 5

Accessing leisure and amenities

The next question was designed to explore where respondents travel to use amenities such as shops and leisure centres. The majority (52%) stay local, while Stafford (16%) and Derby (8%) were the next most common destinations. Smaller numbers indicated travel to Burton-upon-Trent, Stoke-on-Trent, Leek, and Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Overall, the results show that the majority of residents in Stone and Uttoxeter rely primarily on nearby facilities for their everyday needs. This was reflected in our conversations on the street, with many out shopping or for coffee on the day. Many noted that they try to shop locally and avoid longer journeys where possible.

Other responses mentioned destinations such as Uttoxeter, Lichfield, Ashbourne, Manchester, Leeds, Eccleshall, London, and Stone town centre, often chosen depending on need or traffic.

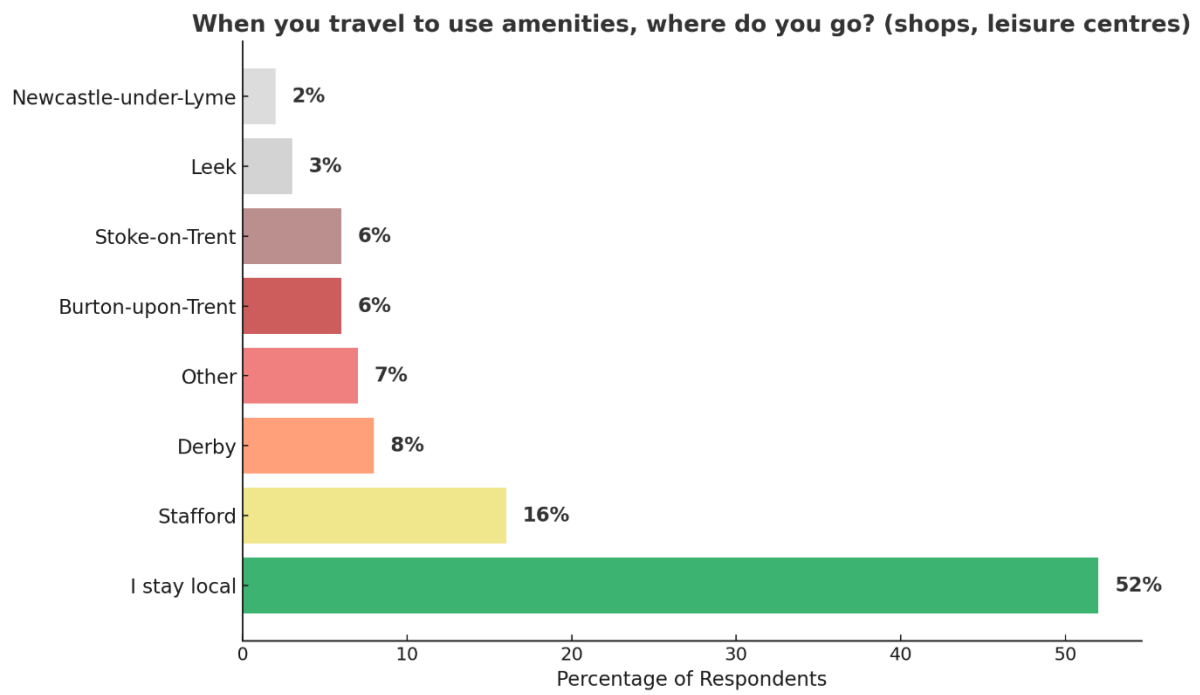


Figure 6

Local Government

Top priorities

The survey asked residents to select up to two priorities from a list of options to understand what they consider most important for the future of local government in Staffordshire. The aim was to identify where people think councils should focus their efforts, whether on improving services, strengthening local identity, or supporting the economy.

Priority	Percentage
Better transport links	35%
Local decision-making	33%
High-quality local services	27%
Protect local identity	27%
Growing the local economy	22%
Keeping council tax low	19%
Providing affordable homes	13%
Other	12%

Analysis

Across all respondents, the most common priorities were better transport links (35%) and local decision-making (33%), reflecting a strong desire for both practical infrastructure improvements and a greater local voice in decision-making. Around a quarter of respondents highlighted high-quality local services and protecting local identity (both 27%), suggesting that service delivery and community character are also highly valued.

Economic growth (22%) and keeping council tax low (19%) were seen as important but secondary concerns, while affordable homes (13%) and other issues (12%) were less frequently mentioned. Overall, the responses show a preference for better connectivity, local accountability, and maintaining the quality and distinctiveness of local communities in any future council arrangements.

In both towns, it was acknowledged that local transport services, especially local buses to major cities had become increasingly less reliable and were dissuading people from using them. This was particularly acute in Stone, whereas in Uttoxeter residents generally chose to drive to larger urban areas.

Consultation on options

The penultimate question asked residents to indicate which new council arrangement they believed would best serve Stone and Uttoxeter. This provided a choice between two possible two-council structures West and East or North and South alongside the opportunity to suggest an alternative or say they were unsure.

Which type of new council setup do you believe would best serve your area? (Comparable surveys only)

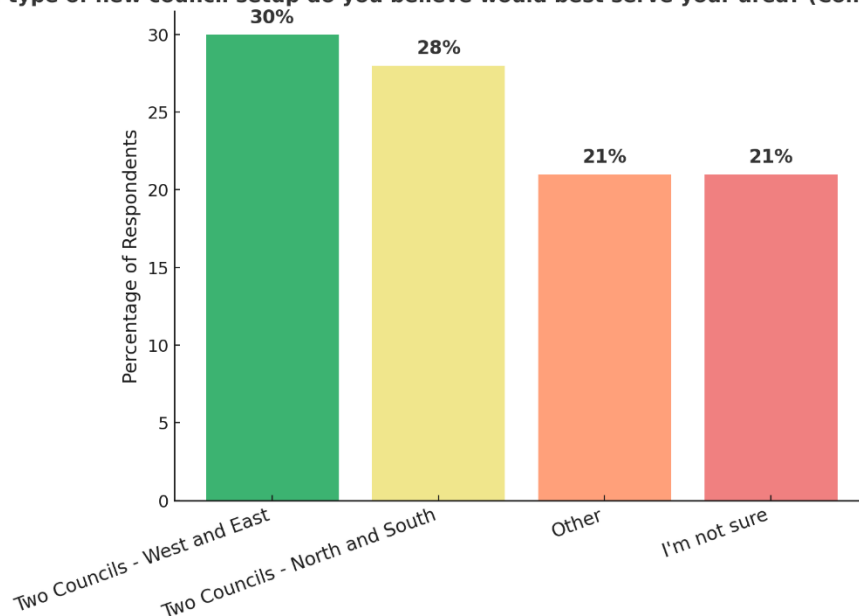


Figure 7

Responses were broadly balanced, with 30% favouring a West and East structure and 28% preferring North and South. A further 21% selected 'Other', while the same proportion said they were 'not sure', suggesting a degree of uncertainty or desire for more information before forming a view.

Several alternative suggestions were made by respondents who felt their areas should align with neighbouring parts of Staffordshire or with other more rural authorities.

Several comments expressed a wish to remain separate from Stoke-on-Trent, citing differences in character and concern over funding priorities. Others favoured maintaining existing boundaries to preserve identity and reduce bureaucracy.

A recurring theme across responses was the importance of local representation, fairness, and maintaining community identity in any future structure. Talking to residents on the street, there was a concern that larger councils could create a lack of local representation, especially on urban issues which are more relevant for towns such as Stone and Uttoxeter.

Overall, the results show no single dominant preference, but a roughly even division between two main two-council options and a significant minority of respondents seeking alternatives or expressing uncertainty. This indicates a need for further engagement and clarity around how different models would affect representation, local identity, and service delivery.

Stone & Uttoxeter within Staffordshire

Finally, participants were asked for their references for how Stone and Uttoxeter should be grouped if Staffordshire were divided into two councils.

In person surveys:

This data was collected at in-person engagement events and during business canvassing sessions.

North Staffordshire – 63% (53 votes)

Southern & Mid Staffs – 32% (27 votes)

I don't know / Other – 5% (4 votes)

Whilst the in-person engagement the choice was between North & South and a Whole County model, on the 9th of September, Staffordshire County Council announced their new preferred LGR model. Instead of one large Staffordshire Council, they would prefer two:

- An East Staffordshire Council replacing Staffordshire Moorlands, East Staffordshire, Lichfield, Tamworth and Stoke-on-Trent.
- A West Staffordshire Council replacing Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stafford, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire.

The below data was collected through the digital survey.

Results from Stone:

- West Staffordshire – 54% (76 votes)
- I don't know / Other – 24% (34 votes)
- North Staffordshire – 22% (31 votes)

Analysis

A clear majority of respondents (over half) favoured Stone joining West Staffordshire, suggesting stronger perceived geographic, cultural, or economic ties with the western part of the county. North Staffordshire received relatively low support, with roughly one in five respondents preferring that alignment.

Results from Uttoxeter

- East Staffordshire – 52% (66 votes)
- I don't know / Other – 34% (44 votes)
- North Staffordshire – 14% (18 votes)

Analysis:

The majority opinion places Uttoxeter in East Staffordshire, aligning with its traditional orientation toward Burton and the east of the county. However, a notable one-third of respondents were unsure or suggested other options, indicating less consensus or lower local engagement with the issue.

Future of Local Government

The final question was an open-ended one: *“Is there anything else important for the future of Local Government?”*

This question aimed to capture residents' wider views on the future priorities and direction of local government in Staffordshire. It provided an opportunity for respondents to express, in their own words, what they believe should guide future decision-making and reform, beyond the structured options offered elsewhere in the survey.

The key themes emerging were:

a) Protecting local identity and representation

- A dominant theme across responses was the need to retain local control and representation, through councillors attached to each area.
- Many respondents emphasised that Stone and Uttoxeter should not be grouped with Stoke-on-Trent, citing fears that smaller towns would “lose their voice” or “become the poor relation” within a larger authority.
- Others called for smaller, more locally focused councils or the continuation of existing arrangements under Stafford Borough Council in Stone.

b) Accountability, transparency, and communication

- Numerous comments highlighted a desire for greater transparency and accountability in local decision-making.
- Residents called for clearer communication about proposed changes and how council funds are allocated in rural/urban splits.

- Several expressed frustrations at bureaucracy, perceived inefficiency, and a lack of responsiveness from elected representatives.

c) Funding, efficiency, and infrastructure

- Many respondents focused on practical concerns such as infrastructure, housing growth, and the capacity of local services to cope.
- Common points included the need for better roads, public transport, schools, GP access, and policing, particularly in areas experiencing rapid development.
- Some stressed that local government funding should match population growth and that councils must “do more with less” without compromising frontline services.

d) Economic growth and high streets

- Residents in both Stone and Uttoxeter frequently mentioned the need to revitalise town centres, reduce empty units, and attract small and independent businesses.
- Business rates and support for local enterprise were seen as key levers for future prosperity in both Towns, with a general perception that they were in decline.

e) Future of local government

There was a clear division of opinion on local government reform in both Uttoxeter and Stone.

- Positive and pragmatic comments suggested that a restructure could bring efficiency, reduced duplication, and stronger local economies, provided that communities remained represented.
- Negative responses expressed distrust toward reorganisation, describing it as politically driven or a waste of resources that could lead to higher costs and less local accountability.
- Neutral and procedural comments focused on ensuring that any change should be well planned, transparent, and locally informed, with decisions based on what benefits residents rather than political expediency.

Overall Summary

In broad terms, residents want a responsive, transparent, and community-centred local government that protects the distinct identities of towns like Stone and Uttoxeter. While some see merit in structural change to improve efficiency, most emphasised that any future model must preserve local decision-making, ensure fair funding, and invest in essential services such as transport, housing, and high streets.

The overarching sentiment from speaking to residents, was that whilst there is an acceptance that change is inevitable, it is crucial that local priorities and voices should remain central to how local government delivers for people.

Appendix E3

Letter of Support from Uttoxeter Town Council

TOWN CLERK

TELEPHONE (01889) 564085



THE TOWN HALL
HIGH STREET
UTTOXETER
STAFFORDSHIRE
ST14 7HN

UTTOXETER TOWN COUNCIL

LGR/TLJ

31 October 2025

Dear Mike and Andrew,

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

On behalf of Uttoxeter Town Council, I wish to reiterate the Town Council's support for Uttoxeter to be incorporated within the Northern Unitary Authority (NUA). The Council's decision was unanimous. This decision was based on the following reasons:

- (a) that, as part of a NUA, Uttoxeter would be best placed to influence the development of the A50 growth corridor;
- (b) that the Town has broadly common interests with neighbouring market towns such as Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph;
- (c) that the Town shares stronger common economic interests with areas to the north, especially in Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, where one of our major employers, JCB, is located; and
- (d) that incorporating Uttoxeter into a NUA would reflect the dominant travel patterns of residents, for work, retail and entertainment, which are east and west rather than south.

In summary, incorporating Uttoxeter into a Northern Unitary Authority is considered to be the best option for Uttoxeter to protect and develop its local economy and service infrastructure.

The Town Council looks forward to continuing positive conversations on Local Government Reorganisation.

It would be appreciated if you could continue to keep the Council updated on Government updates when available.

Yours sincerely,

Tina Jeffery

Tina Jeffery CILCA
Town Clerk/RFO

Barrie Houlihan

Councillor Barrie Houlihan
Town Mayor of Uttoxeter

FAO Mike Gledhill and Andrew Stokes
Leader and CEO
High Peak Borough Council and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

Appendix F

Indicative Electoral Wards for the two Unitary Councils (including each ward's electorate and number of councillors)

Appendix F1

Democratic Representation North Staffordshire Map

OPTION D



KEY TO STOKE WARDS

- Stoke-on-Trent
21 Abbey Hulton
22 Baddeley, Milton and Norton
23 Basford and Hartshill
24 Bentilee, Ubbertley and Townsend
25 Birches Head and Northwood
26 Blurton
27 Boothen
28 Bradeley and Chell Heath
29 Bucknall and Eaton Park
30 Burslem
31 Burslem Park
32 Dresden and Florence (including Goms Mill)
33 Etruria and Hanley
34 Fenton East
35 Fenton West and Mount Pleasant
36 Ford Green and Smallthorne
37 Goldenhill and Sandyford
38 Great Chell and Packmoor
39 Hanford, Newstead and Trentham
40 Hanley Park, Joiner's Square and Shelton
41 Hartshill Park and Stoke
42 Hollybush
43 Lightwood North and Normacot
44 Little Chell and Stanfield
45 Longton and Meir Hay South
46 Meir Hay North, Parkhall and Weston Coyney
47 Meir North
48 Meir Park
49 Meir South
50 Moorcroft and Sneyd Green
51 Penkhull and Springfields
52 Sandford Hill
53 Trent Vale and Oak Hill
54 Tunstall

KEY TO ELECTORAL DIVISIONS

- East Staffordshire
1 Uttoxeter Rural
2 Uttoxeter Town

Newcastle-under-Lyme
3 Audley and Chesterton
4 Bradwell and Porthill
5 Kidsgrove
6 May Bank and Wolstanton
7 Newcastle Rural
8 Newcastle South
9 Silverdale and Knutton
10 Talke and Red Street
11 Westlands, Thistleberry and Keele

Stafford Borough
12 Stone Rural North
13 Stone Urban

Staffordshire Moorlands
14 Biddulph North
15 Biddulph South and Endon
16 Caverswall
17 Cheadle and Checkley
18 Chumet Valley
19 Leek Rural
20 Leek South

STOKE-ON-TRENT

Appendix F2

Democratic Representation Ward Information North Staffordshire

North Staffordshire Unitary Ward Listing

	Division Name	Proposed number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillors
East Staffordshire				
1	Uttoxeter Rural	2	8,978	4,489
2	Uttoxeter Town	2	10,898	5,449
Newcastle-under-Lyme				
3	Audley and Chesterton	2	10,563	5,282
4	Bradwell and Porthill	2	9,365	4,683
5	Kidsgrove	3	11,249	3,750
6	May Bank and Wolstanton	2	10,095	5,048
7	Newcastle Rural	2	10,384	5,192
8	Newcastle South	2	10,270	5,135
9	Silverdale and Knutton	2	10,427	5,214
10	Talke and Red Street	3	11,236	3,745
11	Westlands, Thistleberry and Keele	2	9,322	4,661
Stafford Borough				
12	Stone Rural North	3	12,303	4,101
13	Stone Urban	3	13,478	4,493
	Staffordshire Moorlands			
14	Biddulph North	2	9,645	4,823
15	Biddulph South and Endon	3	11,886	3,962
16	Caverswall	2	10,941	5,471
17	Cheadle and Checkley	3	11,243	3,748
18	Churnet Valley	3	11,034	3,678
19	Leek Rural	2	10,728	5,364
20	Leek South	3	11,579	3,860
Stoke-on-Trent				
21	Abbey Hulton	1	5,002	5,002
22	Baddeley, Milton and Norton	3	14,306	4,769
23	Basford and Hartshill	1	4,399	4,399
24	Bentilee, Ubbberley and Townsend	2	9,102	4,551
25	Birches Head and Northwood	2	8,278	4,139
26	Blurton	1	4,756	4,756
27	Boothem	1	4,023	4,023
28	Bradeley and Chell Heath	1	4,205	4,205
29	Bucknall and Eaton Park	1	4,718	4,718
30	Burslem	1	4,595	4,595
31	Burslem Park	1	4,335	4,335
32	Dresden and Florence (including Goms Mill)	1	3,680	3,680
33	Etruria and Hanley	1	4,298	4,298
34	Fenton East	1	4,491	4,491
35	Fenton West and Mount Pleasant	1	4,496	4,496
36	Ford Green and Smallthorne	1	4,734	4,734

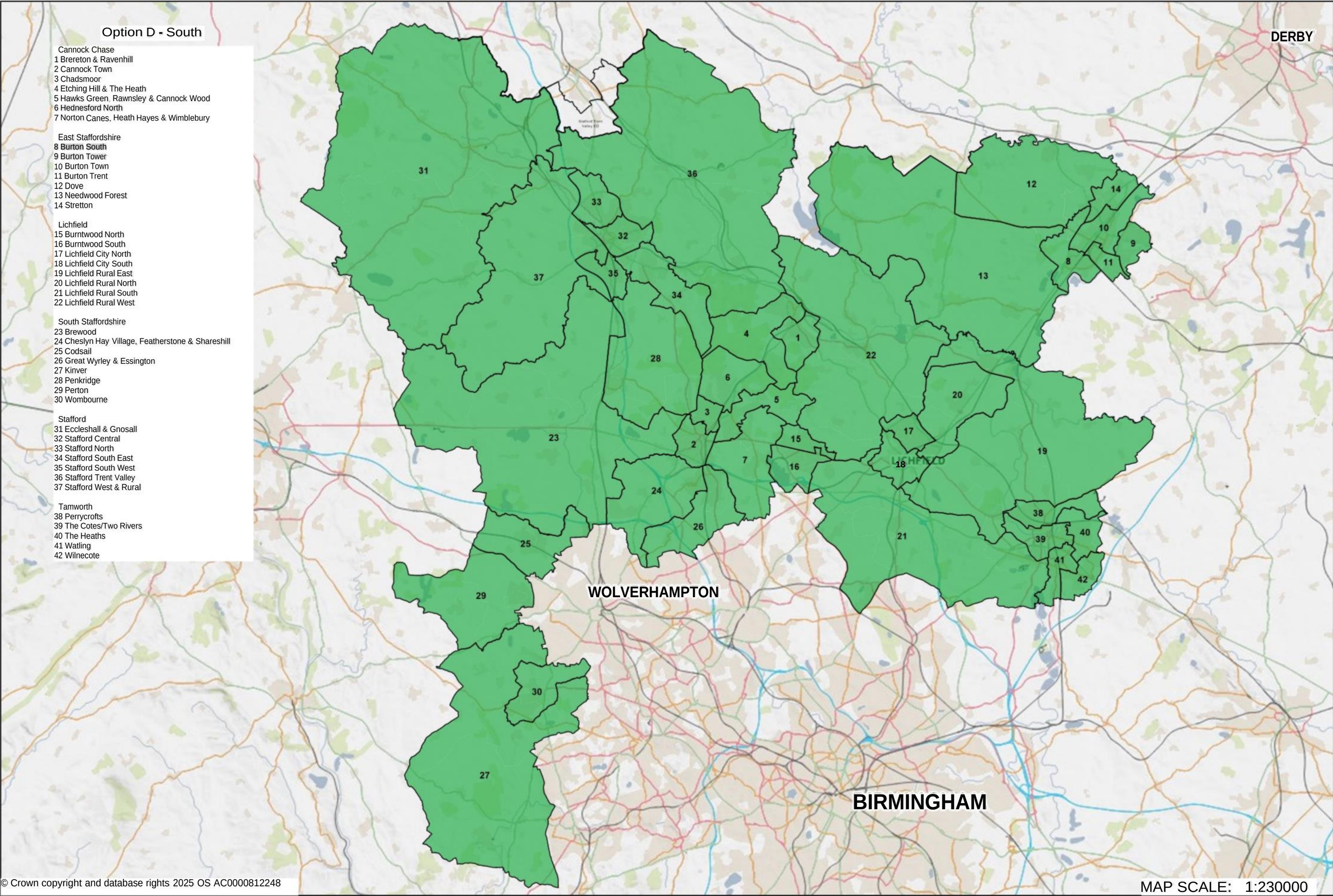


	Division Name	Proposed number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillors
37	Goldenhill and Sandyford	1	4,742	4,742
38	Great Chell and Packmoor	2	8,515	4,258
39	Hanford, Newstead and Trentham	3	14,258	4,753
40	Hanley Park, Joiner's Square and Shelton	2	8,629	4,315
41	Hartshill Park and Stoke	1	3,712	3,712
42	Hollybush	1	4,580	4,580
43	Lightwood North and Normacot	1	4,695	4,695
44	Little Chell and Stanfield	1	4,461	4,461
45	Longton and Meir Hay South	1	4,600	4,600
46	Meir Hay North, Parkhall and Weston Coyney	2	9,831	4,916
47	Meir North	1	4,946	4,946
48	Meir Park	1	4,044	4,044
49	Meir South	1	4,444	4,444
50	Moorcroft and Sneyd Green	2	9,027	4,514
51	Penkhull and Springfields	1	4,303	4,303
52	Sandford Hill	1	4,622	4,622
53	Trent Vale and Oak Hill	1	4,175	4,175
54	Tunstall	1	4,982	4,982
Totals		92	413,608	
Average				4,496



Appendix F3

Democratic Representation Map Southern and Mid Staffordshire



Appendix F4

Democratic Representation Ward Information Southern and Mid Staffordshire

Southern and Mid-Staffordshire Ward Listing

	Division Name	Proposed number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillors
Cannock Chase				
1	Brereton & Ravenhill	2	8,618	4,309
2	Cannock Town	2	11,520	5,760
3	Chadsmoor	2	10,783	5,392
4	Etching Hill & The Heath	2	10,231	5,116
5	Hawks Green, Rawnsley & Cannock Wood	2	11,968	5,984
6	Hednesford North	2	12,015	6,008
7	Norton Canes, Heath Hayes & Wimblebury	2	12,191	6,096
East Staffordshire				
8	Burton South	2	8,963	4,482
9	Burton Tower	2	10,989	5,495
10	Burton Town	2	11,745	5,873
11	Burton Trent	2	9,986	4,993
12	Dove	2	9,286	4,643
13	Needwood Forest	2	10,000	5,000
14	Stretton	2	11,630	5,815
Lichfield				
15	Burntwood North	2	10,997	5,499
16	Burntwood South	2	10,762	5,381
17	Lichfield City North	2	11,651	5,826
18	Lichfield City South	2	11,200	5,600
19	Lichfield Rural East	2	8,759	4,380
20	Lichfield Rural North	2	8,675	4,338
21	Lichfield Rural South	2	12,143	6,072
22	Lichfield Rural West	2	10,888	5,444
South Staffordshire				
23	Brewood	2	10,396	5,198
24	Cheslyn Hay Village, Featherstone & Shareshill	2	10,835	5,418
25	Codsall	2	10,178	5,089
26	Great Wyrley & Essington	2	11,763	5,882
27	Kinver	2	10,757	5,379
28	Penkridge	2	11,459	5,730
29	Perton	2	9,629	4,815
30	Wombourne	2	11,352	5,676

	Division Name	Proposed number of councillors	Electorate	Number of electors per councillors
Stafford				
31	Eccleshall & Gnosall	2	10,941	5,471
32	Stafford Central	2	12,197	6,099
33	Stafford North	2	11,585	5,793
34	Stafford South East	2	12,580	6,290
35	Stafford South West	2	11,629	5,815
36	Stafford Trent Valley	2	9,952	4,976
37	Stafford West & Rural	2	9,940	4,970
Tamworth				
38	Perrycrofts	2	11,888	5,944
39	The Cotes/Two Rivers	2	12,435	6,218
40	The Heaths	2	11,775	5,888
41	Watling	2	12,369	6,185
42	Wilnecote	2	12,013	6,007
Totals		84	460,673	
Average				5,484



Appendix G

Neighbourhood Engagement and Empowerment

Evidence of Existing Local Engagement and Impact

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent: A track record of community engagement

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent have a strong and history of engaging communities to ensure that services reflect local needs and priorities. Across the county, recent strategies and initiatives demonstrate a commitment to listening, collaborating and empowering residents.

This strategic intent has been matched by practical engagement activity on the ground. Consultation and stakeholder feedback across the county reveal how these frameworks translate into lived experience; highlighting what matters most to residents and where future engagement can be strengthened.

Residents consistently expressed a desire for clear communication, transparency, and evidence that their input directly shapes outcomes. Input from SMDC reinforced that communities value clarity, consistency, and accountability in engagement. Stakeholders welcomed the opportunity presented by unitary local government to implement lessons from successful reorganisations elsewhere, ensuring resident insight drives service delivery and resources are allocated effectively across the county.

At the county level, the Staffordshire Communities Strategy (2024 - 2029) outlines a clear approach to working with communities over the next five years, embedding engagement into service design and delivery. The Working with People and Communities Strategy (2022/23), developed by Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board (ICB), aimed to strengthen collaboration with residents and the VCSE sector to shape health and care services. Initiatives such as the Citizens Inquiry Programme (2023) and the Community Learning Strategy (2023 -

2027) further demonstrate a focus on co-production, skills development and supporting residents to influence local outcomes.

Stoke-on-Trent's Community Cohesion Strategy (2020 - 2024) and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue's Community Risk Management Plan (2025 - 2028) reinforce this approach, highlighting how partnership working and prevention are central to local planning and community safety.

District councils across Staffordshire mirror this commitment, tailoring engagement to the distinct needs of local communities. Stafford Borough Council's Local Plan Engagement (2023) used digital tools to involve residents, schools and stakeholders in shaping local development. South Staffordshire District Council's Place Narrative (2023) and Corporate Peer Challenge (2023) employed inclusive approaches to ensure decisions reflect community priorities, with thousands of residents contributing their views. The Moorlands Together Community Safety Partnership Plan (2023 - 24) demonstrates how multi-agency collaboration can focus resources in disadvantaged areas, while the joint Communications Strategy (2025 - 2028) between SMDC and High Peak councils underlines the value of coordinated, transparent engagement across local government.

Together, these examples provide a strong evidence base that Staffordshire communities are actively shaping the services that affect their lives. They illustrate how residents, councils and partners collaborate to co-design solutions, prioritise local needs and build trust across communities. This embedded culture of engagement provides the

foundation upon which Neighbourhood Area Committees and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will operate, ensuring that the new two-unitary structure not only preserves local identity but also strengthens residents' ability to influence decisions, shape services and see tangible outcomes in every neighbourhood.

Communities in action

Building on these formal strategies and programmes, communities across Staffordshire are already actively shaping services in practice. From parish-led regeneration projects to district-level participatory budgeting and collaborative VCSE initiatives, residents, councillors and local organisations have shown that empowered communities can deliver practical solutions, strengthen social cohesion and influence service design.

In Stafford, the Eastgate regeneration scheme is a £30 million project transforming key town centre sites, including former magistrates' court buildings, into new homes, businesses and leisure spaces. This initiative forms part of a broader masterplan to revitalise Stafford town centre, coordinated by the county council.

Across the county, local councils, voluntary organisations and residents collaborate through neighbourhood and district-level initiatives to drive local priorities. The VCSE Healthy Communities Alliance, a partnership between voluntary sector representatives and the Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care System (ICS), works to improve health and wellbeing outcomes in communities across Staffordshire.

These examples provide a strong foundation for scaling local influence. Neighbourhood Area Committees and Integrated Neighbourhood Teams will build on this experience, ensuring that local insight drives decision-making and tangible outcomes in every neighbourhood.

Building on this local knowledge, the following

case studies illustrate how neighbourhood-focused initiatives translate community engagement into real-world impact, demonstrating the effectiveness of devolved decision-making and collaborative action across Staffordshire.

Case Studies: evidence of local impact

Staffordshire's communities benefit from a long tradition of locally responsive, community-driven action, delivered through district councils, Town & Parish councils and VCSE networks. These examples demonstrate how decision-making rooted in local insight and neighbourhood priorities drives tangible outcomes, fosters trust and strengthens social cohesion.

Parish engagement feedback confirms that residents and Town & Parish councils are actively shaping services. Local insight drives tangible outcomes, strengthens social cohesion, and supports service design. This evidence underscores that NACs and INTs build on existing successes and amplify the impact of community-driven initiatives.

The following case studies illustrate the distinctive strengths of this locally embedded approach, showing how neighbourhood-focused services, collaborative partnerships and participatory initiatives have delivered results tailored to the diverse needs of Staffordshire's towns, villages and rural communities. They show that:

- Local authorities with a strong neighbourhood focus can identify subtle differences in need and respond quickly to emerging challenges.
- Empowered communities are able to shape services and influence outcomes, creating solutions that work in practice rather than in theory.
- Place-based knowledge and trusted cross-sector relationships are critical to delivering preventative, coordinated and sustainable services.

- Scalable local innovation demonstrates how successful neighbourhood initiatives can be amplified across a broader geography when supported by strategically resourced, locally embedded governance.

The table below shows these approaches in action, demonstrating why two unitary councils are needed. This structure preserves local insight and responsiveness while providing the scale to support neighbourhood governance, preventative services and effective multi-agency collaboration.

Example	Focus	Outcome	Strategic Insight	Source
Leek & Moorlands Community Safety Hub	Tackling anti-social behaviour, drug-related harm and local safety concerns through multi-agency collaboration.	Reduced repeat incidents; improved coordination between police, social services and community partners.	Demonstrates how localised teams respond rapidly to emerging issues, highlighting the importance of neighbourhood-focused governance and integrated services.	SMDC Community Safety Partnership Plan (2023 - 24)
“Moorlands Together” Place-Based Approach	Integrated multi-agency planning in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.	Coordinated interventions targeting social, economic, and safety challenges.	Shows district-level collaboration delivering outcomes in specific communities; supports value of neighbourhood-focused teams.	SMDC Moorlands Together Community Safety Partnership Plan (2023 - 24)
Burton Market-Town Regeneration	Community-led planning, high-street revitalisation and support for local businesses.	Increased local participation; improved high-street vitality; strengthened community ownership and sense of place.	Shows how local insight shapes tangible regeneration outcomes and supports economic, social, and cultural priorities.	South Staffordshire District Council Place Narrative (2023)
Staffordshire Volunteering Networks (Support Staffordshire)	Engaging residents in social action and rapid response to local crises such as flooding and the Covid19 pandemic.	Enabled community-led action and strengthened volunteer infrastructure.	Highlights the value of VCSE partnerships in mobilising resources and embedding prevention at a neighbourhood level.	Support Staffordshire Annual Report (2023)
Codsall Community Hub - Integrated Service Delivery	Transformative project by South Staffordshire Council, aimed at consolidating local services to enhance accessibility and efficiency.	Improved service accessibility, increased community engagement, enhanced service integration and coordination; reduced duplication of effort.	Exemplifies how local authorities can leverage existing assets to create multifunctional spaces that meet the evolving needs of communities. It underscores the importance of integrated service delivery and community empowerment in fostering resilient and responsive local governance.	South Staffordshire District Council (2022)
Stafford Eastgate Regeneration	Collaborative initiative aiming to transform underutilised public sector sites in Stafford’s town centre into vibrant mixed-use developments.	£30 million investment transforming key sites into homes, businesses and leisure facilities.	Illustrates how collaboration and neighbourhood engagement can deliver complex, multi-stakeholder projects.	Staffordshire County Council and Stafford Borough Council (2025)
VCSE Healthy Communities Alliance (Stoke-on-Trent ICS)	Integrated community health initiatives with voluntary sector and NHS partners.	Improved resilience; better health and wellbeing outcomes; enhanced collaboration.	Increased engagement in preventative health programs; strengthened collaboration between residents, VCSE, and statutory partners.	Stoke-on-Trent ICS, VCSE Healthy Communities Alliance (2023)



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